

PRABUDDHA BHARATA

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THE ROAD TO WISDOM

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON *Steps to Realisation V*

Just as the intellect is the instrument of knowledge, so is the heart the instrument of inspiration. In a lower state it is a much weaker instrument than the intellect. An ignorant man knows nothing, but he is a little emotional by nature. Compare him with a great professor what wonderful power the latter possesses! But the professor is bound by his intellect, and he can be a devil and an intellectual man at the same time; but the man of heart can never be a devil; no man with emotion was ever a devil. Properly cultivated, the heart can be changed, and will go beyond intellect; it will be changed into inspiration. Man will have to go beyond intellect in the end. The knowledge of man, his powers of perception, of reasoning and intellect and heart, all are busy churning this milk of the world. Out of long churning comes butter, and this butter is God. Men of heart get the 'butter', and the 'buttermilk' is left for the intellectual. These are all preparations for the heart, for that love, for that intense sympathy appertaining to the heart. It is not at all necessary to be educated or learned to get to God. A sage once told me, 'To kill others one must be equipped with swords and shields, but to commit suicide a needle is sufficient; so to teach others, much intellect and learning are necessary, but not so for your own self illumination.' Are you pure? If you are pure, you will reach



God. 'Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.' If you are not pure, and you know all the sciences in the world, that will not help you at all; you may be buried in all the books you read, but that will not be of much use. It is the heart that reaches the goal. Follow the heart. A pure heart sees beyond the intellect; it gets inspired; it knows things that reason can never know, and whenever there is conflict between the pure heart and the intellect, always side with the pure heart, even if you think what your heart is doing is unreasonable. When it is desirous of doing good to others, your brain may tell you that it is not politic to do so, but follow your heart, and you will find that you make less mistakes than by following your intellect. The pure heart is the best mirror for the reflection of truth, so all these disciplines are for the purification of the heart. And as soon as it is pure, all truths flash upon it in a minute; all truth in the universe will manifest in your heart if you are sufficiently pure.

From *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*,
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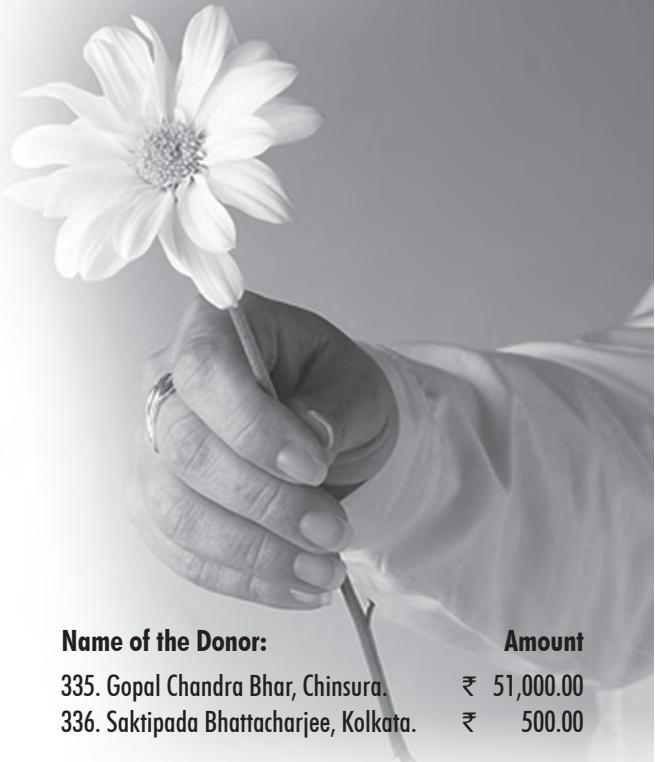
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मैत्रायणीयोपनिषद्

तत्सवितुवरेण्यमित्यसौ वा आदित्यः सविता स वा एवं प्रवरणीय आत्मकामेनेत्याहुर्ब्रह्मवादिनोऽथ
भगोदेवस्य धीमहीति सविता वै देवस्ततो योऽस्य भगाख्यस्तं चिन्तयामीत्याहुर्ब्रह्मवादिनोऽथ धियो
यो नः प्रचोदयादिति बुद्ध्यो वै धियस्ता योस्माकं प्रचोदयादित्याहुर्ब्रह्मवादिनः । अथ भर्गा इति यो
ह वा अमुष्मिन्नादित्ये निहितस्तारकोऽक्षिणि वैष भगाख्यो भाभिर्गतिरस्य हीति भगो भर्जयतीति वैष
भर्गा इति रुद्रो ब्रह्मवादिनोऽथ भ इति भामयतीमान् लोकान् र इति रज्जयतीमानि भूतानि ग इति
गच्छन्त्यस्मिन्नागच्छन्त्यस्मादिमाः प्रजास्तस्माद्-भा-र-ग-त्वाद्-भर्गः ॥६.७॥

*Tat-savitur-varenyam-ity-asau va adityah savita sa va evam pravaraniya atmakamenety-abur-
brahmavadino'tha bhargo-devasya dhimahiti savita vai devas-tato yo'sya bhargakhyas-tam
chintayamity-abur-brahmavadino'tha dhiyo yo nah prachodayad-iti buddhoyo vai dhiyasta
yo'smakam prachodayad-ity-abur-brahmavadinah. Atha bharga iti yo ha va amushminn-aditye
nihitas-tarako'kshini vaisha bhargakhyo bhabhir-gatir-asya hiti bhargo bharjayatiti vaisha bharga
iti rudro brahmavadino'tha bha iti bhamayatiman lokan ra iti rajjayatimani bhutani ga iti
gachchhanty-asminn-agachchhanty-asmad-imah prajas-tastmad-bha-ra-ga-tvad-bhargah (6.7)*

That desirable splendour of Savitri, yonder Sun, indeed, is Savitri. He, indeed, is to be sought thus, by one desirous of the Self, say the expounders of Brahman. May we meditate on the splendour of God. Indeed, Savitri is God. Therefore, I meditate on that which is God's splendour, say the expounders of Brahman. May God illumine our thoughts. Indeed, thoughts are meditations. May God illumine these for us, say the expounders of Brahman. Now splendour, indeed, one who is hidden in yonder Sun or the pupil in the eye is called splendour. He is so called because his course is with the rays of light or he is Rudra because he causes to dry up, say the expounders of Brahman. Now, *bha* means that he illuminates these worlds, *ra* means that he gladdens these beings, *ga* means that beings here go into him and come out of him. Therefore, because of being *bha*, *ra*, *ga*, he is *bharga*. (6.7)

THIS MONTH

HOW IMPORTANT are desires? Are they necessary for human evolution? Are we really evolving? What is the cause of suffering and how to get rid of suffering? These points are discussed in **Transcending Desires**.

The cosmic dance of Shiva and the insights of Sri Aurobindo and Swami Vivekananda on the universal significance of this dance are analysed in the **Giant Dance of Shiva** by Shruti Bidwai-kar, Assistant Director, Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research, Puducherry.

Myth has innumerable themes. Different countries, religions, and traditions have different mythic themes. These themes reflect the culture, behaviour, and the social set up of that tradition. An attempt to understand myth as a religious phenomenon, its meaning and nature is made in **Myth and Mythic Themes** by Dr Sanjukta Bhattacharyya, Assistant Professor of philosophy, Raja Peary Mohan College, Hooghly District, West Bengal.

Swami Saradhananda was an illuminated beacon among the disciples of Sri Sarada Devi. His spiritual wisdom and insight have inspired the lives of countless spiritual aspirants. Swami Shuklatmananda, a monk at Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Haridwar, served Swami Saradhananda for ten years from 1978 to 1988 in Vrindavan. He shares with the readers his precious and blissful experiences in the holy company of Swami Saradhananda in the third instalment of **Gems of Memories: Reminiscences of Swami Saradhananda**.

Swami Sandarshananda, a monk at

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur, Kolkata, in the sixth instalment of **Saga of Epic Proportions**, shows how Sister Nivedita had an impeccable ability to delve into the abstract which India is always to the Western mind and the manner in which she delineated the intricacy of Indian race, comparing with the Western, how she dealt with the society, civilisation, and culture of India.

Many wonderful nuggets of wisdom contained in ancient scriptures are difficult to understand. In *Balabodha*, such ancient wisdom is made easy. This month's topic is **Bhakti**. Understanding this word is necessary to understand many discussions in Indian philosophy and also to understand the discipline of bhakti yoga.

Being compassionate and merciful are sterling qualities of a human being and these qualities evoke goodness in others also. A person who shows kindness and mercy is never forsaken by God and always is protected from all evil. Hence, everyone should be merciful. This is depicted in the story **Mercy is Honoured**. This story is this month's *Traditional Tales* and has been translated from the Tamil book *Arulneri Kathaigal*.

William Desmond, Professor of philosophy, Higher Institute of Philosophy, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, David R Cook Visiting Chair in philosophy at Vilanova University and the author of *Being and the Between* and *Ethics and the Between* has written the book **The Intimate Universal: The Hidden Porosity Among Religion, Art, Philosophy, and Politics**. From this book, we bring you this month's *Manana*.

Transcending Desires

THAT DESIRE is the propelling force for the advancement of human civilisation is the belief of most people. Many believe that it is good to have desires as they are the cause of the evolution of human society. But is the human society truly evolving? Do desires really help human development? Or, at a deeper level, has there been any development at all? What has changed in terms of the basic factors of life? Nothing.

In terms of space, time, and causation, this manifest universe has been the same throughout its history of billions of years, at least as we know it. For instance, in the case of any movement, it has to be from point A to point B, no matter how this movement is accomplished. In the case of time, the constructs or notions of the past, present, and the future have been the same all through. Similarly in the case of causation, every cause has an effect, and every effect can become a cause. These basic factors of the manifest or apparent universe have never changed and never will. To put it succinctly, only the how has changed, not the why. The process has changed, not the principle. The fact that one has to travel has remained, only the mode of travel has changed. The fact that one has to follow time has remained, only the methods of keeping time have changed.

Now, we have to think about what would happen to the universe if there were no desires at an individual level. What would happen to the cosmos if the reader of these words stops desiring? Are the basic factors of this manifest

universe independent of the desires of an individual? Will time, space, and causation cease to exist at the macro level, just because a person

Only the how has changed, not the why. The process has changed, not the principle.

has realised their unreality? No. That would not happen, because the macro universe, though identical with the micro universe of the individual, operates at a different level and has a collective ignorance as its cause. So, a person who has understood the unreality of this universe and the concepts of time, space, and causation, would not consider them to be true, but would perceive them. This perception would be similar to a perception of an optical illusion *after* knowing such illusion to be untrue. For example, when one travels on a tarred road in a hot afternoon, one sees a mirage of water even though knowing full well that it is not real.

Why should we transcend desires? We should transcend them because they are the root cause of our misery or suffering. Each desire is a seed for a thought or tendency in our mind. The only way to control or conquer the mind is to eradicate desires. If there would be no desire, there would be no suffering.

If it is so simple to achieve freedom from suffering, why doesn't everyone get rid of desires? The problem is twofold. We are attached to the notions of 'I' and 'mine'. The notion of 'I' leads to the need for having an identity, a false identity, for oneself, away from one's true

nature. Devoid of the knowledge of one's real nature, a person has the compulsive tendency to associate oneself with a particular position or status. One wants to call oneself a doctor, an engineer, an accountant, an artist, a musician, or some such other title to give an identity to oneself. Without such an identity, one is afraid of losing one's grip over life, one is afraid of losing the meaning in life. Without desires, a person cannot hold on to a particular identity and feels that there would be nothing to do in life. That is the main cause why people are afraid to give up desires. If one is convinced about one's true nature, the Atman, there would be no need to compulsively hold on to a false identity and crave to maintain it by having many desires.

The other problem that comes in one's way of transcending desires is the notion of 'mine'. This notion is manifested in the desire to own things and retain them. For example, you want to click photographs of a tourist attraction, even though millions of photographs of that place are available for free on the Internet. The reason is that those photographs are not related to you! So, it is not just the experience one has but the idea that one is connected to the experience that is problematic. And this leads to another serious problem of comparison with others. Even if one is convinced of the futility of desires and wants to get rid of them, one is dissuaded by the thought: 'What would others say about me if I have no ambition or desire in life?' 'What would people say if I am unable to achieve anything in life?'

The image of oneself that others have is a strong impetus to act for a person. This happens because one does not have a clear understanding or true image of oneself. And so, to make for the absence of a consistent image, one searches for external acknowledgement of one's personality. As long as one perceives an external 'other', there

can be no consistency in one's thoughts regarding anything. And hence, a person who depends upon one's image as seen by others has no consistency regarding one's personality.

What happens when someone realises the futility of having desires and completely stops having any new desire? Does that person become inert? No. When a person stops having fresh desires, the effects of the actions done previously start taking effect and eventually, that person gets freed from the transmigratory cycle of repeated births and deaths.

It is very easy to mistake a lazy person with one who has realised the Atman. While externally they might appear similar, a lazy person's mind is full of unfulfilled desires, whereas an enlightened person has gone beyond all desires. To transcend desires is the only way to go beyond suffering. We suffer because we want. We want suffering. To get rid of suffering, we have to get rid of wants.

The first and the most important step in transcending desires is to become aware of one's true nature, which is beyond the body and the mind. However, one might argue that the desire to know God or Brahman is also a desire. However, such a desire is not really a desire, because such a desire becomes the nemesis of all desires. It is a desire to kill the mind, which is the source of all desires. This desire to realise one's true nature is the beginning of the path to attain a never-ending bliss and the only way to get liberation. Transcending desires is possible only by abstention from fresh desires and the eradication of old desires. This can be achieved only by a process of continuous introspection and discernment. Dispassion towards sense-objects and the withdrawal of the senses from such sense-objects would result in a detached attitude in all day-to-day dealings and this practice would eventually lead to desirelessness.

The Giant Dance of Shiva

Shruti Bidwaikar

A giant dance of Shiva tore the past;
There was a thunder as of worlds that fall;
Earth was o'errun with fire and the roar of Death
Clamouring to slay a world
 his hunger had made;
There was a clangour of Destruction's wings:
The Titan's battle-cry was in my ears,
Alarm and rumour shook the armoured Night.¹

THESE LINES from Sri Aurobindo's epic poem *Savitri* at once bring forth the vision of Nataraja, the cosmic dance of Lord Shiva as depicted in the bronze statues in South India. These statues present themselves as spiritual texts that one may interpret them, or realise the underlying power and truth. It may therefore be attempted to read the statue of Nataraja or the cosmic dance of Shiva as poetry in sculpture. Perfect as it is in its symbolism and suggestiveness, it allows a deeper scrutiny of the nature in which poetry allows inquiry. Therefore, then the parameters applied to read spiritual poetry may also be read in the bronze statue.

It is not out of fancy that poetry and sculpture are being compared and the parameters of criticism imposed upon sculpture. This inquiry is based on Sri Aurobindo's comments and explanations of the nature of Indian Art and the highest kind of poetry. While detailing the nature of Indian sculpture Sri Aurobindo remarks: 'All great artistic work proceeds from an act of intuition, not really an intellectual idea or a splendid imagination,—these are only mental translations,—but a direct intuition of some truth of life or being, some significant form of

that truth, some development of it in the mind of man' (20.266).

In his treatise on poetry he writes: 'All poetry except that of the most outward kind ... is in its inmost inspiration and character intuitive, more a creation of the vision and feeling than of the intelligence ... The initiating inspiration must always be intuitive in a greater or lesser degree and it is the form or expression that differs' (26.288). In both the instances quoted above Sri Aurobindo emphasises that art and poetry have to spring from an intuitive level and also have to be judged by a similar intuition. This allows us to study sculpture and poetry with the same parameters. It may not be understood that this analysis has sprung from intuition; however, it is an attempt to take Sri Aurobindo's own description of the highest poetry and study how far it may be applicable to the statue of Nataraja. In this paper, a reference to Lord Shiva would only be as represented in the Nataraja statue.

There is another parameter that allows a comparison between poetry and the Nataraja statue and this is 'rhythm'. Swami Vivekananda in his poem 'The Dance of Shiva' says: 'Seven worlds play the rhythm; As the trembling earth sways almost to dissolution; Lo, the Great God Shiva is dancing.'² Sri Aurobindo too in his poem 'Shiva' writes: 'The rhythmic worlds describe that passion-dance.'³ Dance and poetry are invariably connected to rhythm. Therefore, the dance of Shiva could be studied in close connection to poetry.

The parameters of intuitive poetry described

by Sri Aurobindo in ‘The Future Poetry’ that may be applied to the Nataraja statue are ‘five eternal powers, Truth, Beauty, Delight, Life and the Spirit’ (26.222). He calls them ‘the five suns of poetry’ (*ibid.*). While Sri Aurobindo mentions of the ‘eternal powers’, it may also be read in relation to the five basic elements of which this universe is made—ether, air, fire, water, and earth. Heinrich Zimmer explains how these are connected to Nataraja:

The upper right hand [of Nataraja], it will be observed, carries a little drum, shaped like an hour-glass, for the beating of the rhythm. This connotes Sound, the vehicle of speech, the conveyer of revelation, tradition, incantation, magic, and divine truth. Furthermore, Sound is associated in India with Ether, the first of the five elements. Ether is the primary and most subtly pervasive manifestation of the divine Substance. Out of it unfold, in the evolution of the universe, all the other elements, Air, Fire, Water, and Earth.⁴

Sound is another principle upon which Sri Aurobindo lays great emphasis. In his commentary on the *Kena Upanishad*, he says: ‘Vibration of sound has the power to create—and to destroy—forms; this is a commonplace of modern Science.’⁵ He further adds: ‘The theory of creation by the Word which is the absolute expression of the Truth, and the theory of the material creation by sound-vibration in the ether correspond and are two logical poles of the same idea. They both belong to the same ancient Vedic system’ (18.32).

Here we get a deeper clue of the connection between Shiva, the lord of dance, the creator and poetry as creative word as envisaged by Sri Aurobindo and utilised by the Vedic Rishis of the yore. Therefore, the analysis of the dance of Shiva may be taken up from Spirit instead of Truth, for Spirit is the creator of all.

‘The poetic word is a vehicle of the spirit, the chosen medium of the soul’s self-expression’

(26.287). The Nataraja statue is a vision of the sculptor who saw the lord in his cosmic dance of creation. Therefore, it does not resemble any human figure but the sculptor’s ‘eye sees the psychic line and turn of things and he replaces by them the material contours’ (20.294). The dance of Shiva is not just perfect artistry, but represents the extent to which the sculptor has realised the working and the form of the Lord. He has carved him with utmost detail and cares not depicting a story but portraying the rhythm of the creation and its sustenance. It is his inward eye that has grasped this form and as Sri Aurobindo says, it is only an inner eye that can perceive the Spirit behind the statue.

If we juxtapose the five elements of poetry with that of five basic elements of creation we form a logical connection between Ether-Spirit, Air-Truth, Fire-Beauty, Water-Delight, and Earth-Life. Ether manifests Air; similarly, Spirit is expressed as truth. The widely-known truth of Lord Shiva or Nataraja is that of the creator and destroyer. Ananda K Coomaraswamy enlists five activities that the dance of Shiva represents creation, preservation, destruction, embodiment, and salvation.⁶ Zimmer gives a slightly different version of this—creation, maintenance, destruction, concealment, and favour.⁷ Shiva’s dance, *tandava*, is known for his act of destruction. Here we may refer again to the lines quoted from *Savitri* in the beginning of this paper: ‘A giant dance of Shiva tore the past.’ It is significant to note that Sri Aurobindo does not consider the act of Shiva as mere destruction, but the destruction of all that obstructs progress and evolution. All that is good and useful for the future is preserved, hence his image as preserver. He lays the foundation for a new creation. In *Savitri* too, Sri Aurobindo writes of the advent of the ‘sun-eyed children’, the new race which could come on earth only after the benevolent act of Shiva.⁸

Anand K. Coomaraswamy quotes a translation of *Chidambara Mummani Kovai*, which describes the features of Nataraja and says: ‘All these worlds are transformed by Thy hand bearing fire.’⁹ Therefore, Nataraja can also be seen as the Lord of transformation. In one of her conversations the Mother Mira Alfassa narrates how Shiva offered her the help to begin the work of transforming the body for which Sri Aurobindo began the work in 1926.¹⁰ This then is the truth of Lord Shiva if read from Sri Aurobindo’s perspective: that he is the Lord who creates—depicted through the symbol of drum—and transforms the earth by eliminating the evil and non-divine while facilitating the transformation of the physical nature itself.

In the sequence of creation next come fire and water that we have equated with beauty and delight. Beauty and delight are indispensable and are intertwined in the mind of the poet. ‘Delight is the soul of existence, beauty the intense impression, the concentrated form of delight; and these two fundamental things tend to be one for the mind of the artist and the poet.’¹¹ Such delight and beauty is evident in the Nataraja statue. Beauty is not only evident in the perfection of carving but the symbolism captured in the representation of fire. Delight is suggested in the grace of postures and the calm facial expressions of the Lord. Sri Aurobindo marvels at the representation of this delight and beauty: ‘What of the marvellous genius and skill in the treatment of the cosmic movement and delight of the dance of Shiva, the success with which the posture of every limb is made to bring out the rhythm of the significance, the rapturous intensity and abandon of the movement itself and yet the just restraint in the intensity of motion, the subtle variation of each element of the single theme in the seizing idea of these master sculptors?’ (20.292).

It may be required to dwell a little on the representation of ‘fire’ in the statue. Fire is assigned as the destructive *agni* in the hand of Shiva and the fire which forms his halo represents *tapas*. It is significant to note that Lord Shiva represents ‘power’ in the pantheon of gods. He is also known as the Lord of *tapas*, of intense askesis. In the figure of the dance of Shiva, fire may represent that *tapas*, power and the fire in his hand may stand for the aspirations of the humankind that have reached him. This *agni*, may thus destroy the *tamas* and all that is dark in the human being and salvage one from one’s lower nature. This could be equated with the fire that transforms and not the fire that destroys. The dwarf demon that is trampled by the Lord is a clear sign of destroying ignorance and darkness. If we probe deeper into the statue, there is no reason to represent this aspect of destruction again and again in the same figure. It would perhaps be more appropriate to see fire as transforming and the feet destroying the unwanted.

Sri Aurobindo over and again emphasises the fact that all creation takes its birth in delight and tries to express this delight. The dance of Shiva too expresses the serene ecstasy of creation. A close look at the statue reveals that it represents both Shiva and Shakti, the ideative and the creative aspects of the Absolute. It would have been certainly an inspired moment when the statue was being carved. The sculptor could see the Lord representing the static and the dynamic, the ecstatic and the rapturous expressions of the divine. In fact many studies have made note of all the features that portray femininity in this statue thus representing both Shiva and Shakti in the same figure. It is indeed the delightful image of the Lord and his consort represented in perfect physical features that are in harmony.

‘The enlightening power of the poet’s creation is the vision of truth, its moving power is a

passion of beauty and delight, but its sustaining power and that which makes it great and vital is the breath of life' (26.242). It is true of the five elements also. Without the creation of earth the manifestation would not be complete. Without the breath of life, poetry or art would not be complete. The Nataraja statue is an example of this complete manifestation on earth of the element of life. It is significant that the dance takes place here in the world and not in the solitudes of heaven. One of the interpretations of the symbols of the circle of fire around the figure of Shiva is that the Lord is creating through his rhythmic dance while being a part of it and not from some other pedestal. He is as much a part of our universe as we are. He has not left us alone. He is here on the earth, in the life plane amidst us constantly destroying the asura, the non-divine within us.

Interestingly the studies by Zimmer and Swami Kritarthananda¹² speak of the significance of the creative word *Aum* in connection with the halo and the drum. We have already discussed the connection of sound and creation. This creative word is *Aum*, the 'mystical utterance ... stemming from the sacred language of Vedic praise and incantation'¹³ and 'is the source of the ceaseless sound going on in the cosmos called *nada-brahman*'.¹⁴ We may note here that *Aum* is also known as *pranava*, the basic sound that created this manifestation. This *pranava* is the main element of what we call *prana* that sustains life in this creation. So we see a continuum from the Spirit to Life in manifestation represented by the Dance of Shiva.

Interestingly, Swami Kritarthananda also brings to our notice the link between our life, the physical phenomenon of which is explained by science and spirituality that represent the aspect of higher and inner life in science and spirituality:

Scientists have observed a marked similarity between this dynamic movement of particles in the subatomic universe and the macrocosmic dance of *Nataraja*, the king of dancers. This observation leads to the subsequent conclusion that Swami Vivekananda found in the depth of his meditation: 'The microcosm and the macrocosm are built on the same plan.' The *Kathopanishad* also corroborates this concept of identity between the microcosm and the macrocosm in saying, 'What indeed is here, is there; what is there, is here likewise' (*ibid.*).

The statue of Nataraja, thus, represents life in all its scope and beautifully suggests the link of all the five elements of nature and facilitates us to study the elements of poetry envisaged by Sri Aurobindo. What Sri Aurobindo wrote for the studies of scriptures may well be applied to the text in sculpture and we may conclude in his words:

Only those Scriptures, religions, philosophies which can be thus constantly renewed, relived, their stuff of permanent truth constantly reshaped and developed in the inner thought and spiritual experience of a developing humanity, continue to be of living importance to mankind. The rest remain as monuments of the past, but have no actual force or vital impulse for the future.¹⁵

The statue of Nataraja has been offering itself for renewed experiences and interpretations ever since it was carved. This constant renewal is the key to its sustenance at the same time; it also proves that the statue of Nataraja is a scripture of philosophy having deeper meaning for which it is approached time and again. 

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Myth and Mythic Themes

Dr Sanjukta Bhattacharyya

AS A SOCIAL PHENOMENON religion is said to be a social bond among the members of society. Usually religion is read as the relationship between human beings and God. The being is bigger and beyond life and death. This religious belief or this ultimate concern is not the topic of discussion here. We shall discuss religion as religious behaviour regarding the sacred and profane. Religion has a historical development and we see that there grow up a cultural system around the sacred objects. Ideas, belief, myth, and rituals developed around the objects venerated as sacred. As a social force, religion has

an integrative as well as divisive aspect. All religions are distinct from one another as they have different attitude and philosophy. Religion is a cultural phenomenon. It manifests itself through different ritual, myth, festival, or ceremony, giving colour and content to a community life. Religion is a cohesive force and binds human beings, as far as a particular society or community is concerned.

Religion also has a psychological side. It reflects human behaviour and human mind. The religious phenomena like ritual, myth, festival, and ceremony manifest the psychological bend

of human mind, their attitudes towards society and fellow human beings. It is said:

In every Religion there are three parts. First, there is the philosophy, which presents the whole scope of that religion, setting forth its basic principles, the goal, and the means for reaching it. The second part is mythology, which is philosophy made concrete. It consists of legends relating to the lives of men or supernatural beings and so forth. It is the abstractions of philosophy concretised in the more or less imaginary lines of men and supernatural beings. The third part is ritual. This is still more concrete and is made up of forms and ceremonies, various physical attitudes, flowers and incense and many others things that appeal to the senses.¹

In this article, the focus is on myth as a religio-cultural phenomenon. It not only has a social and anthropological role but also reflects the psychology and history of the human being in socio-religious culture. It points to the significance of myth in socio-religious culture. The principal aim of this article is to understand myth as a religious phenomenon, its meaning and nature. In this article an attempt is also made to categorise the important mythic themes of the world.

The English word 'myth' comes from the Greek word *muthos*, which points to a story concerning God and the super-human being.² In the *Illustrated Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 'myth' has been defined thus: 'Purely fictitious narrative, usually involving supernatural persons, actions or events, and embodying some popular idea concerning natural or historical phenomena.'³ In another definition, it is said that myth is derived from the Greek word means 'speech' fables or stories about legends and handed down from older times about early history of a race, natural events. Some believe it to be imaginary, fictitious, or invented in the modern sense.

Mythology is the study of the science of myths or body of myths.⁴ It is also defined as:

The myth is generally believed to be a statement of fact by the people who use it. That belief is an error, but the error lies in taking the myth to be a truth. A myth is not a truth, but neither is it to be regarded, when recognized as a myth, to be false. Therefore, it is always a mistake to say that an effective myth is a kind of truth. Rather it is a stimulus to required behavior in dealing with some important reality. Effectiveness and not truth is the criterion to be applied to a myth. Truth may, of course, direct conduct beneficially, but when as assertion is justified on the ground of its edifying influence and not by rational, empirical evidence, it is a myth. When one single, coherent and inclusive tradition shapes the lives of all in the group, this tradition is like a channel guiding them to whatever reality is accessible by this route. In such case truth is not needed. All they need is some stimulus to drive them to follow the ways of the tradition. Myth serves this end.⁵

The same source defined mythologies as 'organized bodies of myths belonging to peoples having in common a tradition and inheritance. Mythology in a scientific sense is the exact study of the origin, history and nature of myths. It has been through the science of mythology that modern man has been able to survey, interpret and inter-relate the numerous mythologies' (*ibid.*)

Myth is the thought, conviction, and faith of those tribes that are non-existent now. It is a key to the development of religion. Myth may give rise to guesses and so require careful investigation to interpret and understand to know exactly if there is any truth at the bottom of it. From Friedrich Max Muller, anthropologists E B Tylor, through Andrew Lang and James Frazer, to the modern psychologists Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung, we have a vast store

of the history of humanity by analysing myth. According to Tylor, Lang, and their followers, myth reflects elements of savage thoughts and belief. It is a way of communication for the tribal in the absence of polished religious ideas and scientific expression.

Analysis of myth brings out customs, folkways, geography, and the climate of a tradition. Therefore, it has an indispensable value to social historians. Both the primitive and the advanced religions require myth for relating the experience with the divine. Myth narrates in the form of a story the nature of an experience or awareness of God. Thus, it is said that mythologies are the early teachers of humanity. By analysing myth, we are now beginning to understand the significance of it in the studies of the archaic and primitive societies. Among those persons, myth happens to be the foundation of social and cultural life. Early people viewed happenings as action and explained them in the forms of narratives. In other words, the ancients narrated stories instead of presenting it by an analysis. For instance, when due to certain atmospheric changes rain came and broke a drought the Babylonians would explain it as a bird 'Imdugud' that intervened and rescued them from drought, it covered the sky with black-storm clouds of its wings and devoured the bull of heaven, whose hot breath had scorched the crops.⁶

For Mircea Eliade, myth deals with a time altogether different from the time of our experience. In the epics, the myth functions as educational tools held in the highest esteem by a society. We find that the themes of myth are innumerable. The characters are often god and goddesses, sometimes animals, plants, mountains, or rivers. It also tells us about the birth, mating, disease and death, climate and ecological changes. In each case, the myth, directly or by implication, barks its striving presentation of events to

an altogether different time and thereby posits its authority. Myth always narrates something as having really happened—whether it deals with the creation of the world or of the most significant animal, vegetable species or of an institution. It reveals the structure of reality and the multiple modalities of being in the world. That is why it is the exemplary model for human behaviour concerned with realities.

'A myth becomes a model for the whole world (which is how one thinks of the society one belongs to) and a model for "eternity" (because it came to pass in *illo tempore* and does not participate in the temporal).'⁷ Myth does not describe what ought to be done, it expresses what must be done. For Victor Turner 'myths are *liminal* phenomena; they are frequently told at a time or in a site that is "betwixt and between".'⁸ The word 'liminal' comes from the Latin word term *limen* signifying threshold. For Turner, liminality is a cultural manifestation of a community. He believed that the recital of the mythical narratives transmits cultural knowledge. Hence, myth has a liminal character. It is recited only at a specific time and place. Most of the myth has ritual, genetic, and critical references.

Jean Paul has given us some characteristics of myth:

1. The 'dimming of opposite' is probably characteristic of most myths. Imaginaries abound such as that of a time before creation, when heaven and earth were not yet separated, or of a beginning in which the two were so close that people could not stand up straight.

2. In a variety of ways myths depict an 'inverse effect'. Somehow, the listener could have in no way anticipated a disastrous event in the story that reads to infinite bliss.

3. 'Subjective reservedness' may be the best formula for the awareness in a myth and its narrator of the curious togetherness of the human

voice that narrates and the sacred; more than human reality narrated. The awareness is expressed in many ways, sometimes elaborately, sometimes in a matter-of-fact manner.

4. ‘Grotesque’ is a term one might feel hesitant to use for sacred traditions and yet it is the most striking form of humour in any tradition other than one’s own.⁹

Myth does something more than just presenting a reasonable explanation of things. Myth sets out to do what ordinary speech cannot. It is said that in myth there is a limitless freedom, a symbolic freedom of action, which is not found in social sanctions and code. It is narrated in a prescribed order and in a symbolic rather than a literal form. Some have concluded, perhaps rather prematurely, that the creations of the unconscious are the ‘raw materials’ of religion and of all that religion includes—symbols, myths, rituals, and so on.

The vast treasures of tribal myth have come to us mainly from travellers, missionaries, colonial administrators, and more recently from the field research of anthropologists. The literate civilisations have unearthed a legacy of writings and inscriptions, which are the mythological heritage. Antique texts have presented archaeologists with initial problems of interpretation. Decipherment of the so-called Linear B script in the 1950s gave us access to the myth of the ancient Mycenaean culture of Crete. However, the script of the Indus Valley civilisation remains undeciphered. If deciphered, we may come to know more about that culture from a study of its religion and myth.

Mythical narratives, like folk stories, generally travel easily from one group of people to another. In the process, myth may change and the change can take place within the same group as it is told and retold. A well-known example of the mobility of myth is the ‘Great Flood’

motif, which occurs all over the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean, including Greece, as well as South and East Asia, and the Americas. Throughout Africa, the semitic and biblical motifs of the ‘Tower of Babel’ and the ‘parting of the waters’ of the Red Sea by a priestly or royal leader occur in numerous local versions. The narratives of Prometheus and of Jason and the Golden Fleece are part of the local mythology of the Caucasus cultures of Georgia and Armenia.¹⁰

Thus, the ‘creative play’ is the essence of myth-making. Although myth changes and develops, it somehow never loses touch with its roots because this experience is about the interconnections between all aspects of life—visible and invisible, terrestrial and celestial, human, animal, vegetable, and mineral. Therefore, myth is all embracing and cosmic in its range. It is a meaning that plays with its hearer or reader, rather than imposing itself. This is the secret of the universal and continuing appeal of myth.

The Great Mythic Themes of the World

Myth has innumerable themes. Different countries, religions, and traditions have different mythic themes. These themes reflect the culture, behaviour, and the social setup of that tradition. It is found that the themes can be categorised under the following heads: myth of the creation of the world, myth of cosmic architecture, myth of humanity, myth of supernatural beings, myth of cosmic disaster, myth of heroes and tricksters, myth of animals and plants, myth of body and soul, and myth of marriage and kinship—to see how much they are common or alike in different cultural tradition.

1. Myth of creation or the origin of the world: The riddle of how the world came to be in the first place is a central problem for all mythologies of Africa, Greek, Australia, South America, India, China, North America, and so

on. Sometimes the beginning of all things is described as a total emptiness or void, or alternatively as a limitless expanse of water, an undifferentiated waste clothed in darkness. However, the most widely distributed creation image depicts the primal universe in the form of an egg, containing the potentiality of everything within its all-enveloping shell. Under this main theme, there are also many other sub-themes. They are:

Duality: In all mythologies, the initial meaning of creation is the appearance of separation and plurality in place of oneness and undifferentiating. Typically, the first stage is the most elementary form of distinction, that is, duality. In North America the myth-making imagination of the Hopi people portrays a series of worlds, the first of which was destroyed by fire, the second by freezing, the third by flood; we are now in the fourth world, which is also due to come to an end soon.

Life Out of Death: In many traditions, creation is brought about by sacrificial death.

Cyclical Worlds: Some mythologies formalise the struggle between creative order and destructive chaos in terms of a perpetual cycle of creation and destruction, by which worlds are unendingly brought into existence, destroyed, and redeemed. Myths on this theme are found in the Hopi tradition of North America. This scheme resembles that of the Aztecs of Central America, whose mythology tells of the successive creation and destruction of five worlds, brought about by conflicts between the various divine offspring of the lord of duality.

2. *Myth of cosmic architecture or the structure of the universe:* In myth the visible world of everyday life is always part of a larger whole. Most traditions describe the normally invisible components of the universe as a world above, or heaven, which is the abode of superior beings, gods or divine ancestors; and an underworld, peopled by the dead

and by subterranean spirits. This theme is mainly based on the following subjects:

The four directions and the elements: The mythical universe has a lateral as well as a vertical structure. Throughout the world, ancient traditions describe the four quarters that correspond to the cardinal directions, east, west, north, and south, as the fundamental divisions of horizontal space.

The heavenly bodies: The celestial bodies commonly appear in myth as living beings, variously divine, human, or animal. The sun appears most often as a male divinity. Myths of this type are found in Chinese and North American mythological traditions. In view of the general lack of cosmological and cosmographical myths, it will be no surprise that Chinese myths relating to the sun, the moon, and the stars are sketchy and generally inconsistent. There is a hole in the top of the sky called 'Lie-chhiu', through which the lightning flashes. Beyond this there is nothing. Similarly, there is a horizontal gap between earth and sky and beyond this a void. Sun, moon, and stars are inside the earth-sky complex. There is some evidence, of considerable antiquity, to suggest that sun and moon are related through a common father, the emperor Shun. Both 'sun' and 'moon' are in fact, suns and moons; ten and twelve in number respectively. Each of these heavenly bodies is in the care of a mother who is in some sense responsible for their proper functioning.

The house as cosmic model: In many parts of the world, houses or dwelling places are consciously modelled on a mythological picture of the universe.

3. *Myth of humanity or the cause of life and death:* Surprisingly, many mythologies around the world have comparatively little to say about the creation of human beings. The Hebraic tradition represented in the biblical book of Genesis says merely that God 'created man in his own

image'. According to one Greek myth, the first man was created from clay and the first woman from earth. Commonly, a more elaborate account is given of cosmic creation than of the origins of humankind. Apart from the Greek, the Chinese and North American traditions also have similar themes,

4. Myth of supernatural beings or God, spirits, and demons: In all mythologies the principal actors in the drama of cosmic creation begin as spirit-beings so fundamental or so awe-inspiring, or both, as to be describable only as generalities. The Greek, Egyptian, Indian, Roman, Celtic, and South American traditions also have similar themes.

5. Myth of cosmic disasters or the end of the world: Global catastrophe is sometimes seen in myth as a deserved punishment inflicted by the gods for the folly or wickedness of humankind. The Hebraic story of Noah and the Ark is a familiar version of this idea: Noah and his wife, with the animals they save, are the only survivors of a great flood brought on by God as a punishment for the world's sinfulness. The story echoes an Assyro-Babylonian account—from which it is probably derived—of a cosmic deluge, the 'Utnapishtim' as the Noah figure, who after his adventure becomes immortal. Indian mythology contains an echo of the Middle Eastern 'Ark' theme. Manu, the first man, earns the gratitude of a little fish, which he saves from being eaten by larger ones. Later, the fish, which has grown to enormous size, warns Manu of coming cosmic deluge and instructs him on how to build a ship and stock it with 'the seed of all things'. The gigantic fish then tows the laden vessel to safety.

6. Myth of heroes and tricksters or the agents of change: The mythological traditions of all cultures feature heroic figures, who perform extraordinary feats in the course of laying the foundations of human society. Usually,

these 'culture heroes' are male, are possessed of supernatural abilities, and may indeed be gods. Australians, Greek, Egyptian, Indian, Roman, Celtic, and South American traditions also have similar myths.

7. Myth of animals and plants: Some animals and plants figure in myth all over the world. Commonly, certain birds symbolise the upper world of spirits, while immense serpents represent the chaotic energy contained in the underworld. South American, Chinese, and African traditions have similar myths.

8. Myth of body and soul or the spirit and the afterlife: The mythological imagination everywhere tends to see the visible world of daily life as containing, or in some way associated with, and invisible essence, which could be called 'soul' or 'spirit'. In the case of powerful objects such as the sun, the soul or spirit essence is easily envisaged as an especially potent deity. Some such deity is similarly attributed to the moon, the earth and spectacular features of the landscape such as mountains, lakes, or even large trees.

9. Myth on marriage and kinship or myth of social order: Myth is often concerned with validating fundamental social distinctions, such as those between the rulers and the ruled in societies with hereditary kingship. There are also myths between social classes or castes, between old and young, between male and female, particularly in the relationship of marriage. These types of myths are very much prominent in Australian and African mythological tradition.

Thus, from the above discussion it can be said that myth is a driving force required to deal with reality. Analysis of myth brings out customs, folkways, geography, and a climate of a tradition. Both the primitive and the advanced religions require myth for relating the human experience with the divine. By analysing myth, we can understand the significance of it in the studies of

the archaic and primitive societies and how much they have survived in modern socio-religious culture even if in changed forms. Myth happens to be the foundation of social and cultural life. The characters of myth are often god and goddesses, sometimes animals, plants, mountains, or rivers. It also tells us about the birth, mating, disease and death, climate, and ecological changes. It is the exemplary models for human behaviour concerned with the realities. A myth becomes a model for the whole world.



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3. *Illustrated Shorter Oxford Dictionary*, ed. R E Allen (New Delhi: Oxford University, 1984).
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9. See 'Myth: An Overview', 10.267.
10. See *World Mythology*, ed. Roy Willis (London: Duncan Baird, 1996), 12.

Lord Mahesh in Elephanta Cave



Gems of Memories: Reminiscences of Swami Saradhananda

Swami Shuklatmananda

(Continued from the previous issue)



SUPPOSING THERE WAS SOME DELAY or perhaps a mistake in performing a task entrusted to me by Swami Saradhananda, I would be ticked off in one of his chosen telling expressions: 'I knew that this was not to be done by you' or 'That's not your work' or 'It's futile to tell you.' Hearing these words, I would resolutely complete the work as soon as possible. Afterwards he would quip: 'Well, well! It's me who made you work through my infuriating words.' This happened on a number of occasions. Indeed, he used to so closely mix with us that the difference of age was often forgotten. As a result, I, at the prime of my youth then, happened to spend the most joyous time with a person who was well into his nineties. Indeed, those weeks passed by as days.

I never found him enquiring after the money somebody might have offered to him. He would also discourage his attendants to have undue involvement in this regard. If any money order or other money offering came, he would immediately ask us to deposit the amount in the office instead of keeping it in the room, lest we should develop any desire to spend it. When I started attending upon him, I had the notion that all these were deposited in his name. One day, out

of sheer curiosity, I asked him if he had a personal deposit account. Much annoyed at such a question, he said: 'What have you to do with that?' Cringing with shame, I managed to say: 'Maharaj, believe me, I don't have the slightest desire after your money. I just wanted to know if it is deposited in your name or not.' Then he said: 'All my expenses are provided from the Sadhu Seva Fund of the ashrama. So, whatever money offerings the devotees give me or send to me, I deposit in the Sadhu Seva Fund.'

In matters of spending money, Saradhananda sometimes displayed an uncompromising stance. Once Swami Nityaswarupananda¹⁰ sent a message through the Secretary swami of our ashrama that he wanted to buy something for Saradhananda's daily use. In reply Saradhananda said: 'Please tell him that simply because money comes to him, he should not look upon this as his money. He should carefully spend the hard earned money of the devotees. It should never be spent on trifling matters.' Later, with the permission of Saradhananda, Nityaswarupananda, bought a quilt for him. Maharaj also used this loving gift till his last. The curious thing was, even though Nityaswarupananda and Saradhananda were both disciples of the Holy

Mother, Nityaswarupananda was extremely respectful towards Saradhananda and would ask for his blessings while taking leave. Saradhananda would also bless him by touching his head. Once Saradhananda said to me: 'You see, I have seen many sadhus in my life, but such a soul is very rare. You're indeed a fool if you hope to come across such a monk afterwards!'

I recount an incident here. I was lean and thin when attending upon Saradhananda, I was very lean and thin. Once, Nityaswarupananda commented rather harshly on my physique: 'What a sickly body you have! How will you do Swamiji's work? He wanted muscles of iron and nerves of steel!' Like a fool, I started arguing with him, forgetting all the differences between us. I cheekily said: 'Should I be fat like you then?' The discussion grew hotter and he finally bellowed: 'Get out of here!' I came out silently but in a while felt very conscience-stricken. I

returned to his room within a couple of minutes and found a different person altogether. With his permission I entered his room and wanted to know if he was angry with me. Astonished, he asked: 'Why?' I said: 'I was arguing with you.' Then he said, pointing to the meadow beside: 'Do you see the cows grazing in the meadow? They can't think. They can't speak also. Only human beings can think and hence differences of opinion are bound to crop up. Your opinion may not match with mine, but why should I be angry? I am happy that you dared to speak out your mind!' I was simply amazed to find such large-heartedness that could immediately wipe out all the differences between a novice and such a senior and erudite monk. This incident remains a demonstration of Sri Ramakrishna's words that the anger of a holy man is like a mark on water.

I have no wish to make the futile attempt of measuring the spirituality of Saradhananda. However, in my assessment, the exquisite side of his personality was his love and sympathy for others. I do not think that even parents are capable of showering so much love on their children. I have no power to express this profound feeling in adequate language. Even now, whenever I remember him, I cannot but be moved to the core of my being. I can well imagine that those who tasted the warmth of his love even once will not fail to appreciate this.

In 1985, Swami Adishwarananda, the then Minister of the New York Vedanta Society, came to India and met Saradhananda at Vrindavan. After returning to the US, he wrote in a letter: 'We heard much about the heavenly love of the Holy Mother. We read in books also, but for the first time in my life, did I experience it myself.'

I shall mention a few instances of his love, though the feelings involved therein can hardly be described. If required, his loving concern would sometimes find expression in severe



admonishments to rid us of erring tendencies. For some such reason, he scolded me very harshly one day. As is natural when one gets to hear harsh words from someone very close, I felt deeply hurt. On completion of my routine tasks, I quietly went to the next room after the other attendant arrived. Usually, at that time, I used to do japa. But that day, when I sat for doing japa, I felt an irrepressible urge to cry and I cried profusely in seclusion. Afterwards, I washed my face and went to his room. Saradéshananda was lying on his back, wrapped in a bed sheet from neck to feet and his hands folded on his chest. Entering the room, I immediately busied myself with some activity on the table placed near his feet. On seeing me, he called me twice or thrice. But while going about the task, I wanted to know why he was calling. He didn't answer but kept on asking me to go near him. Eventually, I moved a bit closer and said: 'Maharaj, I can hear you perfectly. Please tell me what you want to say.' But, paying no heed, he kept on gesturing to me like a little boy. Now, seeing no other way out, I had to go near him. As soon as I went, he reached out to me with outstretched hands with motherly love and affection. Overwhelmed, I said: 'Maharaj, what are you doing?' He said to me with infinite kindness: 'My boy, you're hurt and you feel sad!' Tears streamed down my face and in no time all my feelings of hurt were washed away.

One evening, I was lying in bed suffering from headache. It was time for doing japa. Saradéshananda noticed it and said: 'Get up, it's evening already.' To that, I said: 'I have got a headache. I am unable to sit.' Hearing this, he kept on telling me to get up and sit for japa. Until I got up, he went on with various entreaties: 'Just sit for a while, at least to keep up the habit. Please keep my words.' Finally, I jokingly said: 'There are so many people to attend to you when you have a knee pain, but who will massage my head

now?' He said: 'Come here.' As I went near him, he pressed my forehead very softly with his feeble fingers a couple of times and then said: 'Go my boy, sit for japa now. Your headache will go away.' I could not help laughing as I could hardly believe that the headache would be thus cured. However, I sat for japa and for whatever reason the nagging headache just went away all of a sudden. Such was his love!

On another occasion, I was seated, doing japa beside his bed. He called me and said: 'I am having severe knee pain. Please massage a little.' After massaging a while, I said: 'Well, Maharaj, you instruct us to sit for japa in the evening, but today, on the contrary, you asked me to massage your knees!' To that he replied: 'I did not forbid you to do japa. Massage with your hands and continue doing japa in your mind. What's the problem?'

He used to say: 'A sadhu's life itself is the greatest preaching. Remembering this, lead an unblemished life of renunciation following the ideals of Sri Ramakrishna.' According to him, the four pillars for leading an ideal life in the mould of the Ramakrishna Order are as follows:

First, an immaculate character, remaining pure in thought, word, and deed is required. In other words, one should control the sense organs and the mind, along with sublimating the six deadly enemies of mind: lust, anger, greed, pride, delusion, and envy. The most effective way to control the senses is to curb the cravings of the taste organ, tongue. Ninety percent of our misery and diseases arise out of the lack of control of this particular organ. Knowingly or unknowingly, we suffer because of this. Especially, sweets, and hot, spicy foods are at the root of all trouble. Indeed, when such delicious items come our way, many of us throw caution to the wind and eat our fill heartily.

Second, one should have a firm faith in the all-pervading, omnipotent creator of the universe

and the conviction that it has assumed the human form in the person of Sri Ramakrishna for the good of the humanity and the establishment of the holy Order and the religion of this age.

Third, one should have the habit of regular spiritual practices—japa, meditation, prayer, and discussions on scriptural topics. Along with this, one should engage in the study of scriptures, keeping holy company, and performance of activities in the spirit of offering worship to the immanent God.

Finally, one should sincerely love and serve all, not harbouring any animosity or entertaining the least thought of causing harm to other beings, as it hinders our spiritual progress significantly.

Saradhananda used to say:

You have ample scope of holy company in the ashrama. It is almost impossible to become a monk by simply reading books, without the help of holy company. All the scriptures declare the glory of holy company. The faculty of discernment develops by virtue of holy company and scriptural studies. And, under the influence of good tendencies, an intense desire arises to elevate one's life. Never think that you no longer require any holy company because you have joined the Order. Many a time, the comforts of the ashrama causes one to slide into an 'easy-going life'. It is the regular company of holy persons that protects us from all such aberrations.

At some point of time, when I happened to praise the spirit of renunciation, freedom, and austerity of itinerant monks, he said:

How many days have you spent outside? How many monks have you seen? What do you know about their lifestyle? I've spent almost the whole of my life outside. The strength of character is the true wealth of our sadhus. Indeed, the very foundation of monastic life is character. Those who are outside can easily roam about as they please and eat whatever they wish. But then, the slightest inadvertence may well lead one to take to a life of self-indulgence and it happens

many a time. The daily routine of our Order, if followed diligently, can easily bring perfection in *yama*, *niyama*, and asana of *ashtanga* yoga. Without it, doing sadhana is a far cry.

When a monk, who was blessed to have received Saradhananda's special affection, expressed his sincere wish to do spiritual practices, Saradhananda said: 'If you want to understand the import of spiritual practices, carefully read and contemplate on the part "As the Spiritual Aspirant" of the book *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master* by Swami Saradananda.'

Once Saradhananda went for seeing the distress relief conducted during the fierce communal violence in Noakhali in 1946. Mahatma Gandhi was also there for the same purpose. Coming in contact with the monks of the Ramakrishna Order, he took an interest in reading *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. Saradhananda used to read the *Gospel* to him every day. It was discontinued after a few days though, as Gandhi had to leave the place under the pressure of Muslim League leaders.¹¹

If the monks and Gandhi happened to go together to any place, the monks would always want Gandhi to be in the front, however Gandhi would never agree with this. In fact, with all humility, he would always follow the monks.

One day when Saradhananda went for the usual reading of the *Gospel*, Gandhi's secretary, probably Nirmal Bose said to Saradhananda that Gandhi was very busy that day and so, he had to come back. But, when Gandhi came to know of this, he expressed regret and said: 'Was that also not part of my busy schedule?' In other words, the reading of the *Gospel* was among his priorities. Swami Yuktananda, who was a student of Nirmal Bose in the university, later recounted this to Saradhananda. When we later requested, Saradhananda to tell us more about that episode, he declined to say anything. He

said: 'You see, talking about such things amounts to self-praise. Gandhi was such a great man!'

One day, Saradhananda suddenly called me and said: 'Take a pencil and write!' He dictated:

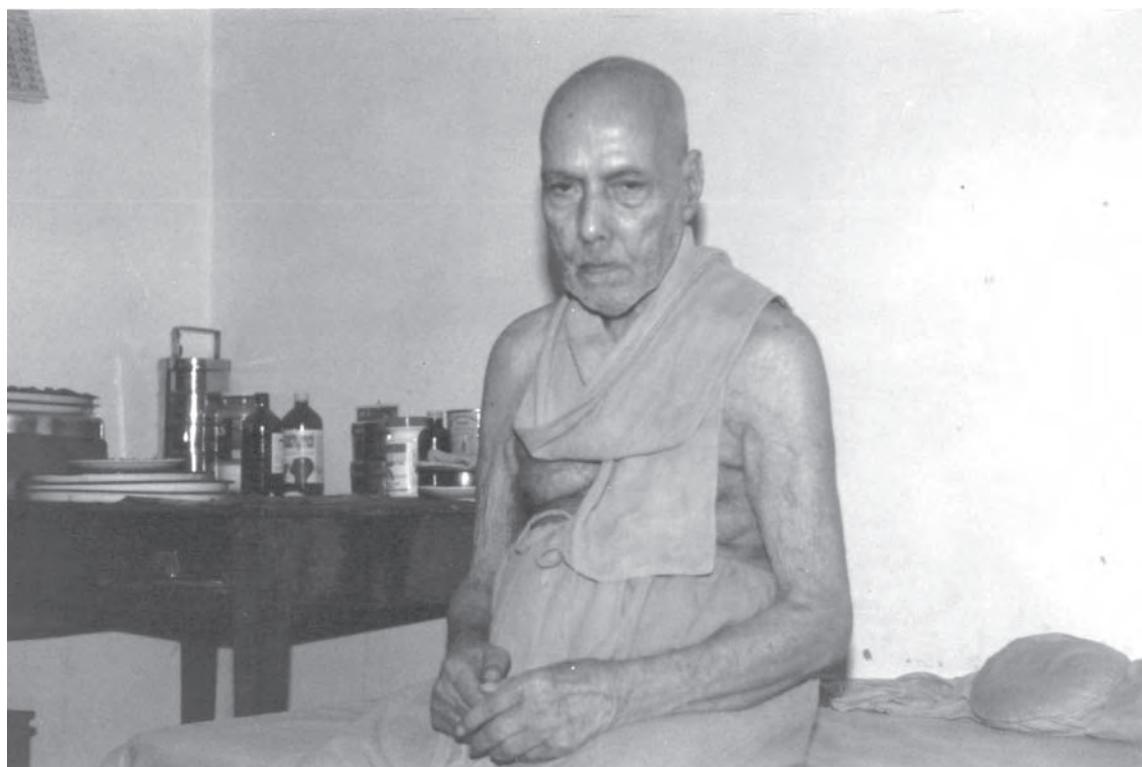
When the deadly poison, disgorged during the churning of the ocean, was about to destroy the world, Lord Shiva consumed this venom himself and made the gods immortal by giving them the nectar. Thus, with this poison in his throat, he came to be known as *neelakantha*. In the present age, when the deadly poison of abject materiality spewed forth by the human being's preoccupation with physical sciences was about to devour the human society, Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna, having digested this venom of atheism, gave to the world His immortal *kathamrita*, the *Gospel*, the nectarine words soaked in the supreme devotion and faith, and thereby saved it from the impending doom. This poison manifested in his throat as cancer.

Once the writing was over, I asked: 'Maharaj,

what to do with it now?' He said: 'Just keep it. It was going around in my mind. That's why I told you.'

He would thus occasionally ask us to jot down some such musings or would simply articulate them from time to time. On another occasion he asked me to write down the following:

Man's birth, growth, sustenance, education, prosperity, and peace greatly depend on the womankind. Through his divine life, Sri Ramakrishna showed the luminous path of virtue to the deluded humanity. For the welfare of the woman-kind especially, he brought before the people the ideal life of his consort Sri Sarada Devi. The womankind of the present age will attain to their highest fulfilment by following the footprints of Sri Sarada Devi, who as the most loving mother, faithful wife, and serving daughter set the loftiest ideal of womanhood. Swami Vivekananda, the chief disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, was to make this ideal life known in the West first in 1893.



Once he wrote to Swami Budhananda: 'In today's society, severe family problems are making life miserable. Peace at home largely depends on women. The advent of the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, was to preach unto womankind the lofty ideal of service. The fragrance of her divine character is permeating the whole world.'

His voice became quite indistinct towards the end of his life. As it was painful for him to say something twice, he would become rather annoyed when asked to repeat anything. Often, he would tell others: 'Are you deaf? Consult a doctor.' I used to quip: 'You need to see a doctor regarding your voice.'

Before asking us to note down anything, he would first collect his thoughts. After we would be ready with paper and pen, he would dictate without a pause and would be greatly annoyed on being interrupted.

Once he said to a monk, close to him:

I tell you something to ponder upon. Now, you are strong and young. You will not always find everything favourable. Try to settle down at a convenient place if you want any improvement in spiritual life. You still have time. You will ruin everything if you stay for a few days in this ashrama and then another few days at another place. You see, everybody appreciates work in our Order. An idle person is a burden to all. Even a servant develops some rights if he works for ten years at a place. I've been trying to tell you these few things for quite some time. Please do settle down somewhere.

Earlier, I mentioned about Saradhananda's reticence about his personal life. In spite of that, I shall share what I have managed to pick up in some unguarded moments.

He hailed from an orthodox Vaishnava family, whose deity was Rajarajeshvara. His mother was an ardent devotee of Sri Chaitanya. Even after becoming a monk, he had the deepest regard for his parents. Remembering his mother's love for Sri

Chaitanya, he prayed to Sri Chaitanya in the prelude of his Bengali book *Shri Shri Chaitanyadev* in the following words: 'Lord, just as you make a cripple cross the mountain, may it please you to bring to fruition this noble attempt of the unworthy author to please one whose nectarine flow of love nourished the author.' In this wonderful poetic prayer, by the word 'whose', he implicitly referred to his own mother. He himself told me this.

His pre-monastic name was Gopesh Chandra Chakravorty. His father was Golok Chandra Chakravorty and his mother was Rasamanjari Devi. His father was an astrologer, but he did not want others in his family to learn that particular discipline, as it literally means groping through the filth of others' lives. He possibly knew that Saradhananda would eventually renounce the world. Saradhananda was born in the Bengali year 1299 on Saturday, Bhadra Krishna Saptami *tithi* in *vrishchika rashi*. His birthplace was the Dulali region of the Sylhet district of Bangladesh. They were four brothers and four sisters. Among them, he was the eldest. The other three brothers were Rakesh, Paresh, and Naresh. Rakesh also became a monk like his elder brother and served for almost the whole of his life in some of the centres of the Ramakrishna Mission, although not formally belonging to it. He was a man of some character and was very hard-working.

Saradhananda told me that this brother of his would at times say: 'We cannot see the bodies of birds and animals when they die in forest. Where do they go? My death will also be like that.' In fact, on one night of torrential rains and snow, he was found missing from one of the centres of Ramakrishna Mission in the Himalayas, probably Almora. Later, the Public Works Department workers reported that a monk's body had been found lying in snow beside a stream. Almora was not so much populated then.

Saradhananda's third younger brother Paresh died young. Naresh, who was the youngest among the four, was married and had three children. I do not think Saradhananda had any connection with his sisters because he once told me: 'I don't know where they are. They didn't maintain any contact after their marriages.'

Saradhananda studied up to the fourth standard in the olden system. Afterwards, through his sincere efforts, he learnt a good many languages. He was well versed in Bengali, Hindi, Sanskrit, and English. His Punjabi, Urdu, and Tamil were also pretty good. We had seen one Sindhi devotee regularly read Urdu magazines to him. Perhaps he learnt Urdu in order to write the book *Paigambar Hazrat Muhammed*, which has not been published. It is said that his translations of Andal's *Tiruppavai* in Bengali was included in a book on Mirabai published from Varanasi. I have not seen that book yet.

It was Swami Premeshananda from whom Saradhananda came to know about Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. I recall in this connection what he said to Swami Suhitananda in Vrindavan:

Swami Premeshananda hailed from a tantric family. His mother was a spiritual aspirant of an exalted stature. Towards the end she attained high spiritual experiences. Tantric chakra used to be regularly held at their house. Many old manuscripts, most probably of tantras, written on barks of trees and old papers were found in their house. They were quite illegible though. We did not know what language it was in. So, failing to appreciate them, they discarded all of them. Had they been preserved properly, they could have been a treasure!

Four freedom fighting groups were active in East Bengal: Suhrit, Bandhav, Anushilan Samiti, and another one I forgot. Swami Premeshananda was an active member of the Suhrit Samiti. Later he drew me also to the group,

although I never participated in their activities. He used to write and do some accounts work for the Samiti. A large assembly was called in Dhaka during the Partition of Bengal for determining the borders in the Assam region. A renowned lawyer of Sylhet, holding the title of Raibahadur, participated in the assembly. Swami Premeshananda went to Dhaka as the personal secretary of this lawyer. It was in Dhaka where he first came to know about Sri Ramakrishna and he returned home with the first part of the *Gospel*. Before that he had searched long for sadhus and in the course of such search, he met Balananda Brahmachari of Deoghar and Sri Tarakishore Chowdhury, who later came to be known as the famous Santdas Kathiya Baba. At last he had correspondence with Mahendranath Gupta, M., after reading *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and this correspondence later developed into a close kinship.

It was Swami Premeshananda who prepared the detailed index of the third part of *Shri Shri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* at M.'s behest. He attended the sacred thread investiture ceremony of Ramlal's son at Dakshineswar with M. There he got acquainted with many sadhus of the Belur Math. One day, M. told him: 'Please go to Belur Math if you want to be a monk. Here it is all eating and sleeping!' Though many young men renounced their hearth and home coming in contact with Swami Premeshananda, he himself joined the Order very late. He thought his frail body would not be able to bear the hardships of monastic life. When his naturally dispassionate mind found the worldly life too distasteful, he embraced the life of renunciation.

Saradhananda said: 'In our times the ambience of Dulali region of Sylhet district resembled that of a university. The place was abuzz with learning activities like studies of the Vedas, Vedanta, Nyaya, Purana, Ayurveda, Tantra, Grammar, Astronomy, and the like. There were many erudite scholars on various subjects. Such a scholarly environment drew numerous students

and scholars from all over India for scriptural studies and discussions.'

Saradhananda, when young, first met Premeshananda in a friendly gathering. In this first meeting itself, they became deeply appreciative of each other. Besides, members from Saradhananda's family used to traditionally act as the family priest at Premeshananda's house. In this connection, the two families were already closely-knit. Though Premeshananda was older than Gopeshananda seven or eight years—Premeshananda was born in 1884 and Saradhananda, probably in 1892—they were quite close to each other. Saradhananda used to speak of him very reverentially. As it has been said earlier, Saradhananda was introduced to the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideals by Premeshananda. Much before that, Premeshananda started a branch centre of the revolutionary group, Suhrit Samiti, with some close friends.

After his coming into contact with Sri Ramakrishna's ideals, that very society took the shape of 'Ramakrishna Seva Samiti'. With Premeshananda's inspiration, Saradhananda actively participated in the activities of the Samiti, japa, meditation, service, and scriptural studies. Apart from the scriptures, they studied other secular topics also. Saradhananda was introduced here to a few monks of the Ramakrishna Order. This acted as an inspiration for him to join the Order.

In 1911 he went to the Belur Math for the first time, but unfortunately could not recall much about this visit. Afterwards, in 1913 he went to see the Holy Mother at Udbodhan, with one of his friends. However, he could not see the Holy Mother as she was at Jayrambati then. At Udbodhan, he got the blessed opportunity to be acquainted with Swami Saradananda and Yogen Ma. He was much impressed with Yogen Ma's behaviour.

(To be continued)

Notes and References

10. Swami Nityaswarupananda was born on 22 February 1899 in Shologhar village of Dhaka district in Bangladesh. A disciple of Holy Mother, he joined the Order in 1925. He was ordained sannyasa by Swami Saradananda in 1927. Nityaswarupananda served at the Advaita Ashrama at Mayavati and at Calcutta till 1933. He was the founder secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata in 1938, rendering his exemplary service of twenty-eight years there in two terms. The building housing the Institute at Gol Park, Kolkata was planned under his supervision. For a few years, he was also the head of the Ramakrishna Math, Baghbazar and Udbodhan Office. Nityaswarupananda passed away at the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture on 22.10.1992. His works include *Education for Human Unity*, *World Civilization*, an exegetical English translation of *Ashtavakra Samhita*, and so on.
11. See Ramesh Chandra Majumder, *Bangla Desher Itihas* (Bengali) (Kolkata: General, 1975), 425.



Saga of Epic Proportions

Swami Sandarshananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

NIVEDITA LOOKED UPON this period of voyage with her Master as the best event of her life. She saw a powerful renewal of her love for him. On July 15 she wrote: ‘Now—he is the whole thing—for good or for evil—instead of growing less, I have grown infinitely *more* personal in my love. ... When one turns to him in thought the heart grows free. Blessed be God for making it possible to love like this.’²⁸ These words are quite important in view of her mental condition she had experienced some time ago in a state of confusion. From Coasting Kent, she wrote; ‘Such a divine talk up on deck! About more early struggles—and then about my school. And last of all I *knelt* and made a pranam!’ (1.182). She ‘caught a glimpse of the fact that his ideal is “to lead like the Baby”’ (1.183). This definitely had made her affection for him heavenly, duly being lost in the beauty of his original divinely being. On 19 July she gave a graphic description of how he was preparing his travelogue for the Bengali organ Udbodhan frantically. ‘I wish you know what a blessing that Bengali magazine is! He spends hours concocting a huge letter to it—full of jokes—observations and the shrill scream of prophesy. His whole heart is going into it, the scathing wrath against Anglicisation, Brahmos and the rest, the love and hope for the masses—his burning love for his Master—shrewd observations of life around him—and over and above all this, a deliberate maltreatment of the Bengali language which makes him about as difficult

to read as Carlyle when he first appeared and which is purposed to serve certain tremendous ends!!!’ (*ibid.*). It is astounding that she could so perfectly summarise Swamiji’s Bengali masterpiece *Parivrajak* and set down in such clear-cut pattern precisely in so few words, giving the impact it was likely to create when published actually. Noticing all her exceptional reactions about Swamiji, one could quietly assess that her love for Swamiji as her spiritual father was cent percent pure and unworldly.

On the other hand, Nivedita was also preparing some matter for publication in the English organ *Prabuddha Bharata* of the Mission, on the voyage. She was doing this work on her impression about India that she gathered in the course of her stay in the country for eighteen months since January 1898. In the first of the couple of letters in June 1899 she sent for the purpose, she wrote at one place:

It was eighteen months ago that I, a stranger, passed this way [her ship left Colombo] before, and tonight, as a man sums up a situation, I have a fancy to make reckoning with my own soul as to the drift of the impressions that I have gathered, in the year and a half just gone.

In the first place, I remember gratefully privileges accorded to few of my race. Received by the Mother-land as one of her own children, I have been permitted to see her, as it were, without her veil. I have been allowed to share in the life of the people. Kindness has been showered upon me. Neither poverty nor worship has been hidden from my eyes.

And the outstanding impression that I have gathered from such experience is that this is a people with a curious habit of producing great men unexpectedly. Whatever may be thought of the average development of character in the race, I am convinced that moral genius is commoner here than elsewhere. For by 'greatness' I do not particularly wish to imply any kind of intellectual or physical expertness—these I regard as more accessories : I refer rather to a certain largeness of feeling which lifts a man out of all that is individual and makes him stand to humanity as the interpreter of another life. Sometimes that life surrounds him almost as a light upon the face; sometimes we realise it in the growing sweetness with which years of self-sacrifice are borne; in India I have seen it lift even scientific research into sainthood. However it manifests itself, we all know that in some men's veins runs the blood of the gods, and of such men India has more than her due share numerically.

And I can trace this effect to three probable causes. The first two I find in the tremendous emotion and concentration of the Hindu temperament. Hindu feeling is something that makes the merely Western feel himself a dwarf before a giant. That jealous privacy that marks the inner life of Oriental nations causes this feature to be little suspected by Europeans. They are more or less deceived by the mask of indifference that is worn with such success (1.281-2).

The entire matter is an insightful analysis which tells her impeccable ability to delve the abstract which India is always to the Western mind. The way she delineates the intricacy of Indian race, comparing with the Western, is a rare piece and an eye-opener at the same time. Likewise, the other matter, dealing with society, civilisation, and culture of India, that she sent after a few days was equally rich and worth studying. A portion of it says:

Hindu culture is, in fact, like a gigantic tree which is constantly embracing a wider and

wider area with its roots. Through ages this huge organism has been at work, silently reclaiming more and more of humanity from barbarism. Perhaps each successive stratum won may have been a new caste taken in. Religious notions would seem to be the first great unifying nerves sent out. Then follow, though in what order I cannot guess, various accretions of custom, till by degrees appear the old gentleness, the old self-direction, and the old horror of defilement' (1.283).

Her proficiency to grasp the epitome of anything Indian leaves one wondering how she could accomplish it in such a short while despite she herself being from an alien culture and civilisation, having her upbringing totally in a different social environment. The only answer one finds to it ultimately is in her wholehearted submission to her Master, and in whose deliberate acceptance of her being a perfect material for discipleship which a perfect teacher always seeks. To harness and channel the verve and talent of her type to a realm hitherto unexplored by any foreign lady was not the job for an ordinary teacher. The intellectual thrust with which she asserted herself required someone of Swamiji's attainment to sustain. The exclusive style and uniqueness traceable in her writings therefore reflect Swamiji's inspiration and training. The stamp of her works is thus extremely scholarly and penetrative.

Swamiji met Nivedita's family for the first time on 31 July 1899. Nivedita was so satisfied to find her whole family kneel 'at the feet of Master'. Swamiji stayed in her house for some time. As a result, a natural bonding grew between Swamiji and her mother, sister, and brother, as if of the same family—observing him highly spiritual and wise, all of them dearly accepted and adored Swamiji as a true prophet. Although her brother Richmond was then quite young, he fondly carried the memory of his affectionate

association with Swamiji all through his life. His love and reverence for Swamiji never diminished in spite of the fact that he saw some carping at Swamiji, which was necessarily out of jealousy and with a purpose to put him down by any means. Later, soon after Swamiji's demise, when he was about to be ordained as a priest in the Church of England, an article against Swamiji to malign his character was written by his detractors in England and was published in some well-known papers. He took it exceptionally and had sent a sharp rejoinder to the editor of such a paper to prove how false the article was, and upheld Swamiji's probity and integrity as unquestionable. Richmond wrote to the editor of *The Morning Leader*, London, on 1 August 1902:

Sir,

In reference to an article which appeared

yesterday in the 'Leader' and which is exaggerated in the 'Star' on Vivekananda, I would beg to suggest that you have been mightily abused. I know how careful you usually are in regard to articles published under your editorship. I am therefore the more surprised that an *unsigned* article written by an enemy—for Swami had many bitter enemies, some missionaries, some Anglo-Indians, on account of Swami's denunciations of them, and others—should have been allowed in. Men like Lord Reay, Archdeacon Wilberforce and Mr. MacNeil (St. James' Gazette) knew and revered Swami. The late Mr. Haweis was one of his most intimate friends. Though I am soon to be ordained in the Orders of the Church of England, yet having come into contact with Swami I have learnt, while still retaining my Christian Faith, to appreciate so good a man.

You know that even here men of great



intellect (e.g. the late Mr. Gladstone) have many bitter enemies who leave no stone unturned to blacken their characters, a fortiori when a man is dead and that in a distant land how much easier it is to attack him and how hard to defend him. Your paper is different to the others, and had it appeared in the 'Globe' or 'Mail' I would have passed it, but yours has been so scrupulously just and interested in the welfare of India that I cannot rest till it is set right.

Yours faithfully,

R. S. H. Noble (1.531)

After going through this letter, it is imaginable how profound was Nivedita's influence and effort to make her brother knowledgeable about India, and, similarly, how careful she was while making him understand Swamiji in order to be able to gauge his personality. The above letter of Richmond speaks for itself in these regards eloquently. Its language is polite, but its matter difficult to ignore, being founded on fact and conviction.

Nivedita's notion with respect to the Tagores was undergoing change then onwards. The sequence of events led her to reassess them. She could by and by see that her Master was indeed a veracious witness and his opinion about them was not biased or prejudiced, therefore not ignorable. She wanted them to join hands with Ramakrishna Mission for serving the nation. It, however, never sounded plausible to Swamiji. He knew their vanity—of wealth, lineage, culture, and Brahmo superciliousness—would be an irrevocable blockade against its happening. Yet, as his wont was, he didn't feel like discouraging her. It was a kind of experiment by her.

Rabindranath's elder sister Swarnakumari's daughter Sarala Ghoshal was in touch with Swamiji through correspondence. She was inspired by Swamiji's success in the West and looked upon him as her role model, so to say. She

was the editor of the famous Bengali periodical *Bharati* started by her mother. She seemed quite promising to Swamiji. He appreciated her indomitable spirit and inclination to work for the country. Nivedita developed an intimacy with her as soon as she arrived in India in 1898. It was practically at Nivedita's behest that Sarala personally met Swamiji at Belur Math. But he was disappointed at her reaction to the proposal of serving the plague afflicted of Calcutta jointly with the Ramakrishna Order. Nivedita told the matter to Macleod on 8 April, 1899 thus:

I told him [Swamiji] of my anxiety and his horoscope. Then he burst forth—'Not another word of superstition. We are going to sweep it all away and make places for Advaitism pure and simple—one in the Himalayas and one here if you like.' He was like a whirlwind. 'We want work—activity—we're going to have a lecture this week—you'll give it and I'll take the chair—all the Calcutta Students—they shall come out and clean the city—all of it—with their own hands—I with them to have "death fever"—do you know what that is? I have been talking to my own boys all yesterday and they are just like leashed hounds.' Then he ordered the posters—amid tremendous excitement. And my mean heart, much to the Mother's amusement, is so pleased that I am to have this one last charge under him ... Just once more as King and Father—without a mock duplicate. Then he told me of a letter from Sarala saying that she and Suren [Surendranath Tagore] regarded these things in the right light—but if he [Swamiji] would only sweep away the worship of Ramakrishna all the others would join him too—for they loved their country and would be glad to help us all. From his answer I should say that there Might be further negotiations. He filled his reply with light raillyery—

- i. If he were convinced that any great good to Humanity would be the result he would sweep away that worship without hesitation. To my look and surprise he added—'of

course, just as if any good to Humanity would be the result I would commit any crime that would take me to the Christian hell, without hesitation.'

2. He was astonished however to hear of this burning patriotism being so successfully impeded by this little Ramakrishna worship. Perhaps his idea of patriotism was different. He thought the mad torrent of the Ganges sweeping over every little hillock and sandbank. They were nothing to it.
3. It was nevertheless true that if the worshippers of Ramakrishna had a right to be considered, no less should Sarala's friends' objections be listened to. And then apparently he ended—I thought it a master stroke (1.108–9).

It surely was a masterstroke as Nivedita had thought. Sarala provoked Swamiji to give a sharp rejoinder to her letter mentioned by Swamiji. He wrote the rejoinder on 16 April 1899 filling it with the above stuff he discussed with Nivedita, in a searing tongue.

Even then, Nivedita was not deterred; she was still hopeful about Sarala's participation in Swamiji's work. In keeping with her belief, she wrote to Macleod on 9 April 1899: 'I have written to the King [Swamiji] that you and Mrs. Bull and I—and one more—Sarala—are his for all eternity, and he should have no anxieties' (1.117). She told again on 25 April: 'Sarala comes to everything and is deeply loved and loving' (1.122). This indicates in spite of his rejoinder of 16 April, Swamiji was affectionate to Sarala. It seems she was on the surface of his mind. His good impression of her stayed untrammeled till he left for the West for the second time.

Swamiji looked to such enthusiastic young well-educated ladies to come out to serve the people. But, at the same time, he knew Sarala's wish would matter little to her family, if

it was the question of their status and identity. It became perfectly clear when Swamiji offered her to accompany him to the West. He thought words from the mouth of an enlightened Indian lady like her would have a great impact and stem the slanders against Indian womanhood spread by Christian organisations, especially by the Ramabai Circle. She had yielded to the notion of her family members and unwillingly refused Swamiji. Much later, in her autobiography, she regretted the course of action taken by the seniors of her kin. She repented for not complying with an offer so precious.

Nivedita had also felt this incorrect before long. In another letter she told Macleod in a short while on 1 May:

Sarola came yesterday. She was sweet—but she has a curious nature and this worship of her own family is very irritating. If she could only once go to England and see how big the world is she would realise how very common even quite distinguished gentlemen are in certain social circles, and cease to worship her uncle [Rabindranath Tagore] and cousin in this aggressive way. She's always telling me her cousin Suren was a greater man, if I only knew it, than Dr. Bose!!! And she insinuates and declares that her uncle is the leader of Young Bengal. But why, if so, she is so anxious to make an alliance between this group two does not appear. She seriously contemplates our entering into a treaty regarding Ramakrishna worship in order to get them!!! I asked her why they couldn't help us as we are. And she said their family credit will be lost. So we are to give up a custom deep in the hearts of all who knew Him, in order 'to save the honour of the Tagores'. After all, who are these Tagores? (1.131).

Nivedita then said how she had given her reaction to Sarala's silly expectation of working with the Mission on their foolish fundamental

term. ‘I retaliated by pointing out that *we* could help *them* as they were, so our point of view seemed to be a trifle bigger. She said perhaps it was’ (*ibid.*).

Swamiji’s language in Bengali in the letter of 16 April was such which had definitely singed the whole of Sarala’s family. This isn’t to be wrong since Nivedita’s letter of 21 May to Macleod says: ‘She [Sarala] says Swami’s Bengali is the language of ‘a loose set,’ vulgar and so on. Everyone feels this, amongst them. Of course the others are men, and fools, but a girl may be forgiven’ (1.149). During the conversation Sarala’s cousin Suren was there. Incidentally, one might recall that Rabindranath praised Swamiji’s Bengali greatly in the course of time. Their talk drifted to Nivedita’s discipleship to Swamiji. Abhayananda (Marie Louise), Swamiji’s another lady disciple from America who betrayed him also came in the talk. She was all the while speaking slander against Swamiji in Calcutta and elsewhere. Nivedita was badly upset by it. She had hot exchanges with her on several occasions. Sarala knew Abhayananda and heard all her false allegations about Swamiji and believed. She put Abhayananda’s view forward and argued with Nivedita in order to criticise Swamiji. And other issues such as plague also arose. Nivedita said to Macleod:

Of course you know all about the reactions of discipleship and so on—but S. [Sarala] is difficult to understand. She paraphrases Abhayananda’s disloyal criticism by saying ‘A. [Abhayananda] says she came to India to learn Vedanta, but she has only succeeded in seeing Vivekananda dancing before the picture of Ramakrishna.’ She [Sarala] imagined that criticism to be perfectly justified. I think I showed her how utterly absurd it was. But she will be swayed by the opposite opinion of the next man she meets. However she said several times with great emphasis that the one abiding argument in Swami’s favour in *all* their minds was ‘your

[Nivedita’s] devotion and you are not a fool.’ I felt so proud, and just looked at you and the Grannie [Bull] to see what *you* would say to your child! For this—it is said—they suspend their judgment still!

I was supremely indifferent to all their opinions in argument, of course, and gave better than I got.

‘Swami had good ideas—plenty—but he carried nothing out. Other people had *tried* agricultural reform. He only talked.’

‘Indeed! *You* talked a good deal about plague work. Who did it? You or we?’

‘Oh *you*—but that was English!’

And then ‘I let into her’ about famine work and nursing and 50 things. *I* had made a noise and so on and so on, and she [Sarala] had to give in.

But she is splendid that way. She takes the hardest things in argument without a trace of personal feeling. She might have been Irish.

Still, you see Swami is the all-absorbing question with them, and I am much mistaken if the sudden blotting out of our whole group does not rob them of their hearts entirely.

He [Swamiji] said to me the other day ‘These people who think themselves so free of me are more abjectly mine than any other, if they only knew!’ (1.149–50).

From this one could very well guess both Nivedita and Sarala were motor-mouthed and had heated arguments often, and none would budge easily from her own position.

Gradually, relationship between the two got sour and then inevitably grew bitter at a point of time. That there was an altercation going on among them is clear from a letter of Sarala given below. The letter was written probably in 1902, before Swamiji’s passing.

Dear Nivedita,

You are noble and selfless. The following

remarks of yours proves it beautifully:—‘My greatest glory in my Guru is that he can hold many hearts who would not admit me.’

By what stages of soul-life did you attain to such culture?

But I shall have to request you once more to forward my letters to Swamiji. Never mind about his perhaps finding in it ‘unjustly’ less than the noblest of me. I am not sure myself how far my stand against you is prompted by the noble racial antagonism and how far by the vulgar selfish ambition. I should be far more humbled by your wish to protect me from a possible bad opinion of your guru which opinion my own feelings expressed in words could alone give rise to. I would a thousand times rather than be *known* as bad, than *seem* good. So please comply with my request and forward my letter at once. Three years ago you had sought me and courted me to join the Mission to which you belong, and take the place in it which you were occupying but which you believed naturally—by birthright belonged to me. You had come with your proposals to the wrong person then. For I was not ready for it at that time. I was a timid, unformed, inexperienced girl three years ago. I am a matured, experienced, self-possessed woman now, fully awake to the capabilities as well as to the limitations within me, and able to face anything and anybody in the world.

It is this sense of tested power in me combined with the irritating indications of superior European airs and imperiousness in you—that I believe has made me throw out the challenge to your ‘Order’. Let me see if it dare be accepted, and whether you have made converts to your faith of India’s self-help in your chosen sphere of work. But apart from the question of a trial

of strength with you an European—it is my self-dedicating love for my country, the wish to follow and take actual part in all its movements and activities, my interest in the Ramakrishna Mission all along, my faith in Swami Vivekananda’s genius from the very first—it is these that have acted as the hidden springs for my offer.

Believe me

Yours sincerely,

Sarola (1,533–4).

(*To be continued*)

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Sarala Devi Chaudhurani (1872–1945)



BALABODHA

Ancient Wisdom Made Easy

Bhakti

BHAKTI OR DEVOTION is central to all religious traditions. Scriptures abound with descriptions of bhakti and countless people practise various disciplines of devotion. One can be a better devotee if one knows the meaning of the word ‘bhakti’. This is a Sanskrit word. Sanskrit is a classical language like Greek, Latin, and Persian. And in Sanskrit, as in most classical languages, most words are derived from a stem or root.

The word ‘bhakti’ is derived from the root *bhaj*, which means to divide, distribute, allot, apportion, share, grant, bestow, furnish, supply, to obtain, receive, partake, enjoy, possess, engage, assume, undergo, feel, pursue, practise, cultivate, prefer, declare, choose, serve, honour, revere, love, adore, deal, chase, and cook. The word ‘bhakti’ means distribution, partition, separation, sharing, decoration, predisposition, attachment, devotion, fondness, trust, homage, worship, piety, faith, love, and a means or path for spiritual knowledge or liberation.

The word ‘bhakti’ is mostly used in the sense of devotion or the path of devotion. Devotion is the most common path in all faith traditions. This comes from the idea of a personal God, an embodiment or an envisioning of God in the form of a living being or more commonly, a human being. God is seen to have incarnated or manifested in the form of a human being with superhuman capabilities. So, this being that is the personal God is both human and beyond, and represents all higher tendencies and aspirations of the human beings.

The human faculty of feeling and love is central to the practice and development of bhakti or devotion. Bhakti is the process of giving a concrete shape to the divinity immanent in all aspects of this universe. The connecting of what one perceives through the senses with the highest divine principle, which could be seen as the highest reality, is the path of bhakti. It is the process of symbolising that which is truly beyond all symbols. A complete self-abnegation is the goal of bhakti and true bhakti can be achieved only by complete annihilation of the petty ego, the ego that stresses on the individuality of a person. The discipline of bhakti is practised at three levels: the stage of the aspirant, the stage of the divine mood, and the stage of becoming one with the chosen ideal.

Bhakti is the nectar that destroys all suffering and creates constant bliss. Bhakti brings spiritual maturity to the aspirant and weakens one’s ego. Faith does not look for logic. All true faith is blind. The highest form of bhakti is an uninterrupted flow of feeling towards God and all forms or names associated with God. Supreme bhakti eschews all desires and the only desire of a *bhakta*—one who has bhakti, a devotee—is to be immersed in the thought and essence of God. It is imperative for bhakti that the ultimate superiority and divinity of God is acknowledged and experienced at every moment of life.

Bhakti is embodied spirituality and requires that all bodily and mental actions are directed towards God. All the senses should be directed towards God and all sense experiences should be experiences of surrender to God.



TRADITIONAL TALES

Mercy is Honoured

THE KING OF AYODHYA, Dileepa, married the princess of Magadha and was ruling his kingdom righteously. They did not have any child even after many years of marriage. Hence, the king and the queen undertook pilgrimages, fasts, and did much charity. They were greatly worried when nothing brought fruit.

Sage Vashishtha was Dileepa's guru. Once, Vashishtha entertained the royal couple as his guests at his ashrama. The king and the queen expressed to him their desire for a child. The omniscient sage told things that he knew from his divine vision: 'Dileepa! You had once been to the abode of gods and had ignored the holy cow, Kamadhenu, who was standing under the wish-fulfilling tree, Kalpavriksha. Kamadhenu got angry on you since you forgot to worship her and get her blessings, and she has cursed you. That is why you are unable to get a child. If you somehow please Kamadhenu, she would undo her curse, and you would get a child.'

The king eagerly asked: 'What would please Kamadhenu and how would her anger subside? I would do accordingly.'

Vashishtha said: 'Kamadhenu also has a calf named Nandini. She is in my ashrama and is now grazing on the riverbank. If you take care of Nandini by giving proper food and shelter and do not let any harm come to her, her mother Kamadhenu's heart would be pleased, and she would undo the curse.'

Dileepa immediately set out in search of Nandini with bow and arrows for his protection. Seeing Nandini grazing on the riverbank, he eagerly approached her with an ardent desire to invite

her to his castle. But, Nandini started running on seeing him. Dileepa followed her. The calf was running, stopping now and then to munch on grass. Dileepa untiringly followed her.

Nandini reached a Himalayan cliff and rested under a tree. Dileepa saw this as the right moment to capture her. However, a tiger appeared suddenly from a nearby bush, ready to pounce upon the calf. Shocked and afraid that the calf might die, Dileepa aimed his arrow at the tiger.

At that time, something wondrous happened. The tiger transformed into an asura, who roared with laughter and declared loudly: 'O Dileepa! Who do you think I am? I am one of the eight forms of Lord Shiva. My name is Kumbhasura.' Dileepa asked in anger: 'What brings you here?'

Kumbhasura roared: 'I am telling you the purpose of my coming here. This tree is greatly cherished by Parvati Devi. She shows more affection to this tree than she shows to her son Skandha. She has ordered me to guard this tree. It is my regular work to kill and eat any animal that rubs its back and peels the bark of this tree. I don't allow standing, lying, or grazing under this tree. The punishment of such acts is that the animals doing it become my prey. I am about to kill this calf for the wrong it has done.'

Dileepa said: 'It is my duty and the order of Sage Vashishta to protect this calf.'

The asura said: 'It is my duty and the order of Parvati and Lord Shiva to kill this calf.'

Dileepa valorously said: 'I would fight with you and protect the calf.'

The asura sneered: 'What! Would you fight me? I am a valorous asura with powers. You are a mere human being. If you fight me, not only you, but the calf would also die. Give up the idea of protecting the calf and save your life.'

Dileepa was dejected and did not find any other way but to obey the asura and asked: 'What should I do to protect the calf?' The asura said: 'You have to become my prey.' Dileepa was disturbed thinking of the young calf becoming the asura's prey and resolved to protect its life. He was prepared to give up his life, dropped his weapons, and got ready to become the asura's prey.

At that moment, a large dazzling light

appeared on the sky. In the centre of that light appeared the benign form of a goddess. Dileepa saluted the goddess with folded hands. 'Dileepa! I am Kamadhenu, also known as Lakshmi. My grace falls upon those who have mercy on living beings. Kamadhenu is the other name for the mercy that pours from one's heart. You did not care for your own life for protecting the calf. I am impressed and happy by your mercy. You will have a son endowed with good tendencies. Your kingdom will prosper.' The goddess blessed thus and disappeared.

Dileepa saw under the tree; the asura and Nandini were not there.

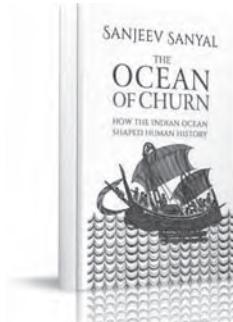


King Vishwamitra Requesting Sage Vashishtha to Give Him Kamadhenu



REVIEWS

*For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,
publishers need to send two copies of their latest publications*



The Ocean of Churn: How the Indian Ocean Shaped Human History

Sanjeev Sanyal

Penguin, Random House India,
7th Floor, Infinity Tower C, DLF
Cyber City, Gurgaon, Haryana
122002. www.penguinbooksindia.com.
2016. xiii + 297 pp. PB. ₹ 599. ISBN
9780670087327.

Sanjeev Sanyal's *The Ocean of Churn* is a fascinating introduction to the continuous churning of people including princes, travellers, traders, soldiers, and things in the Indian Ocean that is characterised by commonalities in culture, bodies, and aesthetics. Each of the eleven chapters of the book, dwell upon some key events during a certain period of time and together they introduce an interconnected history of the Indian Ocean region from antiquity until present. Similarities in the traditional masks from Bali, Sri Lanka, and the Andhra-Odisha coast reflect this trend. Matrilineal customs of the Khasis in the Himalayan foothills, the Chams in Vietnam, and the Khmer in Cambodia forge a similar connection. Sanyal tells us that the royal families of the latter two groups claim descent from a Naga princess called Soma who married a south Indian Brahmin who was on an Indian merchant ship in the Mekong delta that she initially wanted plundered (83).

Interlacing the history that the book depicts are also narratives of myths and tales that have circulated in the landscape of the Indian Ocean region. For example, the giant eagles that were instrumental in flying Sinbad the sailor out of the valley of diamonds or of cinnamon sticks, as well as the giant ants that dug gold and from which humans had to flee, meet the reader in the different chapters and in the many geographic sites along the Ocean's rim where versions of these tales re-emerge.

In mapping human history across the globe's geographic terrain, the author follows the latest trends in history and builds upon the rich, existing historiography of the Indian Ocean region in a way that is most accessible and engaging for a general reader. For instance, he offers a view from the ocean, and of the ocean as a vibrant terrain, where and through which history has been made as opposed to the older land centric histories that spoke about and saw the seas as inert spaces to be crossed.

Sanyal classifies the previous histories of the Indian Ocean into two broad approaches. The first approach includes history of the Indian Ocean as it is recorded from a European perspective. This presents the Indian Ocean world from the eyes of the West and largely documents events that follow the arrival of the Portuguese in 1497. The second approach comprises of a critique of the above perspective. However, for Sanyal these little challenges to the colonial gaze coming from the formerly colonised regions, sharp in their critique as they are, are often limited in their geographic scope. According to the author, *The Ocean of Churn* attempts to remedy the shortcomings of these two approaches. The global scale of the book that the first approach embodies is best demonstrated in Sanyal's work through the strand of genetics. He traces large scale global human migrations before the specific South East Asian migrations of two major ethnic groups, one of which comprise the ancestors of groups like Malays, Indonesians, and the Filipinos and the other group which hints towards the shared matrilineal pasts of the Vietnamese, Cambodians, and the Mon in Myanmar and Thailand. The colonial period is intriguingly described using narratives of individual European persons, sailors and, the rivalry between the Dutch and the British.

Since much of this book's text precedes the

arrival of the Europeans in the Indian Ocean and demonstrates the continued interconnectedness of the ancient Indian Ocean cultures into the present, this book clearly critiques the first approach. Describing the migration of some Indians into Australia around 2000 BCE to demonstrate pre-colonial sailing accomplishments and tracking the first Indonesian outrigger canoes as they made their way to Madagascar, and the battle of Colachel in which a certain Marthanda Varma defeated the Dutch in 1741, Sanyal positions himself firmly in the second category (189).

Sanyal introduces his view of the world as a complex adaptive system where the flow of events is influenced by the constant and unpredictable interactions between many factors including nature, technological change, social and economic forces, culture, ideology, and individual human beings. He subscribes also to the notion of path dependence according to which, once a path is chosen out of several alternative options, it influences all later events.

The Ocean of Churn's most distinctive contribution is a focus on the prevalence of matrilineal customs that invigorate the society and culture as well as harness legitimacy for many ruling dynasties along the Ocean's Eastern shores. These examples range from the Khmer in Cambodia who have a six-headed cobra as their symbol to the Pallava dynasty, around 731 CE in South India whose ruler Nandi Varman II is speculated to have been partly from South East Asia. Contained in the book are references to Queen Hatshepsut (1473–1458 BCE) of Egypt and to that of lesser known queens from among the Khasis of contemporary Meghalaya in North East India whose matrilineal practices may be gleaned through 'the iron age epic Mahabharata' and whom Sanyal calls the daughters of Chitrangada. References to princes who derive royal legitimacy to their thrones from their matrilineal associations with Naga princesses are also sprinkled across the book. Along a similar vein, the book valorises or showcases the oral histories from the Kanara coast of South West India, where the much less famous warrior queens of Ullal—Rani Abbakka, her daughter, and granddaughter defended their territory along using coastal vessels

against larger European ships of the Portuguese (174–5). Another theme that Sanyal mentions as weaving together the many chapters of his book is that of Indian soldiers who have fought battles across the Indian Ocean region, although this aspect is less prominently highlighted in his narrative.

Through these themes Sanyal weaves together a shared social and cultural terrain of the Indian Ocean region that contrasts with the conventional economic history that might exclusively highlight the first multinational trading guilds headquartered in Tamil Nadu. Sanyal's version draws linkages between temple banks and merchant guilds whose economic standing based membership cut across caste lines (134–6). A history on a macro level that catches the larger lines of the world forces is bound to caricature and pick on selected dominant trends, overshadowing the many other diverse tales and softer voices. Somalia comes as a recent addition, introduced as a failed state in the contemporary world, but we hear little of it in the narrative itself. In contrast, the rise and fall and contestations between Persians and the Omanis are centre stage as is a popular narrative of the Ethiopian nation's history. Sanyal also brings into the discussion a version of the history of Islam from the seventh century and the Shia Sunni sectarian divide that followed the battle of Karbala in 680 CE (114–6). He links the growth of some prominent East African ports including Mogadishu, Mombasa, Kilwa with Muslim migrants fleeing persecution in West Asia and mentions the Zanj revolt of 869 CE in Iraq (139).

The present book could have incorporated more voices from the African continent, taking into account the term 'Afrasian Sea' that aims to correct the Indian subcontinent focused prejudice that the term 'Indian Ocean' contains. *The Ocean of Churn* churns up debates in history by challenging the boundaries of area studies that have percolated as common knowledge in Indian history. However, the bias in favour of an India-centric perspective that Sanyal identifies as a drawback of the indigenous approach in Indian Ocean histories persists, arguably for pragmatic reasons, in his own narrative as well.

Similarly, while geographic terrain and environmental history enter *The Ocean of Churn's* narrative with tsunamis, and famines that offer alternative interpretations for some events that are till now largely attributed to say a Chinese invasion, the scope of a geographic history of this vast regions' seascape is still beyond the ambit of a single book.

In the introduction, Sanyal emphasises the importance of travelling to the places that a historian writes about. This approach favours viewing geography and history simultaneously and echoes Sister Nivedita's position on the rendering of history through geography and vice versa in her *Footfalls of Indian History*. Such is the profound contribution of *The Ocean of Churn* to history in general. Piecing together evidence from genetics, archeology, anthropology, and geography, this book traces continental shifts and human migrations from antiquity. However, attributing the entire human history to the shores of the Indian Ocean alone as the subtitle 'How the Indian Ocean Shaped Human History' suggests, might be interpreted as slightly overstated.

The Ocean of Churn is not merely a chronicle of maritime history of the Indian Ocean. It also conveys the gist of Sanyal's analysis of trends in the writing of Indian history that his previous books elaborate and presents a critique of mainstream history in bold and cheerful strokes. For example, he locates the birth of agriculture in the Indian subcontinent and posits that the River Ghaggar known to contemporary archeologists is very likely to be the River Saraswati of the Vedas. Furthermore, he reports evidence that contradicts the 'fact' that king Ashoka's change of heart made him convert to Buddhism and indicates that the king fought battles after converting to Buddhism. He takes apart the image of Tipu Sultan who is celebrated as a patriot who challenged the colonial British forces by emphasising that the Sultan fought with an equal verve against his other Indian rivals. Sanyal highlights the tales of radical revolutionaries such as Subhash Chandra Bose of the Indian National Congress and celebrates the role of the Indian Naval forces whose contributions to India's independence struggle have

been systematically overlooked by nationalist politicians before and after the Independence of India and Pakistan.

The author depicts the continuous movement, circulation, intermingling of royal lineages, peoples, and things through the use of the term 'churn'. One wonders whether the title also imperceptibly hints towards the deep history and myths that surround this very old seascape like the tale of the *samudra manthana*, churning of the ocean, in Hindu mythology that is likely to have occurred in the Indian Ocean. In the present book, the author uses myth, legends, folk tales, oral history, and draws parallels between these local tales and the latest discoveries in science. For example, with regard to the oral history, he asks whether a community's collective memory could contain memories of real migrations (55). Along a similar vein he argues that the Sinhalese memory of their Bengali-Oriya origins is reflected in the composition of a Pali epic, *Mahavamsha*, that narrates the founding myth of Sri Lanka and which is additionally supported by linguistic, genetic, and cultural evidence (65–6). The author carefully alludes to the truth that the tales may contain while continuously maintaining a scientific distance, verifying his data, but not going beyond the limits of what his data testifies.

Although professional historians consume Sanyal's book as 'rather an impish' maritime study targeted at non-historians, the manner in which Sanyal's research is reported shows a sincere quest for objective knowledge. The book demonstrates the work of a scientist who never lets his own ideological position and politics overrule his evidence. Sanyal's position steers clear of the right-left ideological leanings that tamper academic history and has the potential, in noted historian Shiv Vishvanathan's view, to forge a path towards 'an open ended and pluralistic history'.

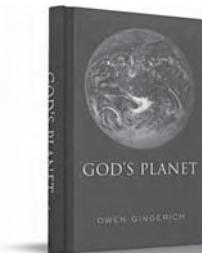
The travelogue like character of the book that meanders swiftly between folklore, anecdotes, present descriptions of historical, archeological sites, and their biographies, carries with it a contagious zeal for history. For instance, Sanyal's narration of the Japanese invasion that marked the

end of European colonial period (248) in Indonesia carries references to a twelfth-century Javanese prophecy that anticipated a similar event. Oral history and memories, stories, myths, and possible truths that sprinkle this panoramic narrative, offer a welcome break from what could otherwise have been dense and detailed records of the past.

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God's Planet

Own Gingerich

Harvard University Press, Cambridge,
Massachusetts, USA. www.hup.harvard.edu. 2014. \$19.95. 170 pp. HB.
ISBN 9780674417106.

Two are the *vidyas*, or sciences, to be acquired by man; so say the knowers of Brahman. One is called *para vidya*, higher science or knowledge and the other is called *apara vidya*, ordinary science or knowledge', says the *Mundaka Upanishad* (1.1.4). In ancient India, all knowledge—relative, science, as well as transcendent, religion or spirituality—was seen as a valid goal for human pursuit and there was no dichotomy between science and religion. But due to its super-naturalistic theology, in the West these two disciplines of human knowledge are almost always at war. Many have believed that these two are 'non-overlapping magisteria', but in *God's Planet*, the well-known astronomer-historian Owen Gingerich argues that this is not a fact; rather science has always been influenced by religious beliefs or disbeliefs and cultural attitudes. Based on his lectures given in 2013, this book views the subject from a historical perspective of science—particularly revisiting the works of Copernicus, Darwin, and Hoyle.

The first question asked is: 'Was Copernicus right?' Detailing the historical background of Copernicus's 'heliocentric model for cosmos', the author shows that for about a century and half, there was reluctance to accept this 'aesthetic and unified model' due to deep-rooted cultural and religious attitudes in educated

people as well as in scientists. Next is the question: 'Was Darwin Right?' Darwin portrays a theory of evolution that makes man a product of 'purposeless and materialistic process'. Many in the US, as well as in other countries, do not like this idea and thus again, the overlapping magisteria of science and religion is seen. The last question is: 'Was Hoyle Right?' After reviewing the opinions of a wide range of scientists, the author points out that 'the great flourishing of modern science has been built on *efficient causes*, how things work, deliberately suppressing the *final causes*, the why of how things work' (132) and proceeds to give his belief in 'a final cause, a Creator God' that can coexist with an efficient cause. In last section the briefly touched topic is the possibility of detecting multiple universes and life on other planets.

The author has given this view through an interesting and compelling historical narrative; also the illustrative diagrams and pictures given in relevant chapters help one grasp the topic under discussion. This book is a welcome addition to the vast literature on science and religion.

Mangesh Buwa
Nashik



A Collection From Śankara's Commentaries on the Prasthāna-Traya

Swami Kritarthananda

Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Gol Park, Kolkata 700029. www.sriramakrishna.org. 2016. xii + 916 pp.
HB. ₹ 600. ISBN 9789381325865.

Philosophical speculation in India could be said to consist of two stages: The pre-systematic age where profound philosophical questions were raised and answers were proposed in the form of stories, metaphors, or conjectures; and the systematic stage where individual schools developed with their clearly marked epistemological and metaphysical theses. The history of Indian philosophy is marked by long commentarial tradition that each of these schools expands into. And while fleshing out the details, the commentaries took the philosophical views

of the opponent very seriously, sometimes in order to refine one's own standpoint, sometimes in order to refute the rival's argument. If one looks at the chronological order of the commentaries in each school, one cannot but notice how each of the commentaries in a particular system improved on the earlier commentaries in view of the several challenges that cropped up after the immediately preceding commentary in the lineage was written. This commentarial development unmistakably shows the importance of the debating tradition in the classical Indian philosophical discourse.

Each of the schools of classical Indian philosophy starts its journey with a set of aphorisms, known as sutras, which are cryptic statements definitive in nature. Advaita Vedanta, one of the thoroughgoing monistic metaphysical systems in Indian philosophy, is not an exception. The *Brahma Sutra* of Badarayana is the fundamental work on which several commentaries were written in the Vedanta system. Among these commentaries, Acharya Shankara's detailed exposition is perhaps the best known work for the logical acumen and philosophical genius that it exhibits. Shankara, with unparalleled brilliance and detailed investigation, champions the main tenets of Advaita metaphysics, refuting all the major rivals including Sankhya, Mimamsa, Buddhism, and Jainism. Since the Upanishads provide our ancestors with the philosophical horizon against which later day philosophical queries were formulated and understood, Acharya Shankara undertook a detailed exposition of these founding texts, so to say, of the ancient Indian philosophical thinking. His philosophical creativity spans over another important work in Indian tradition, the *Bhagavadgita*. The significance of the Gita lies in its ability to raise some profoundly philosophical issues out of a rather worldly predicament. Another attractive aspect of this work is its attempt to offer a synthetic approach to alternative ways of attaining a perfect ideal state of existence. Not surprisingly therefore, these three works, the Upanishads, the Gita, and the *Brahma Sutra*, are regarded as the foundational texts of ancient Indian philosophy, religion, and culture. Acharya Shankara is not

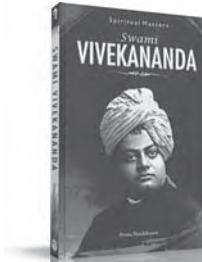
alone in writing commentaries on these foundational texts. In fact, all the eminent figures in the academic world of classical India could not resist from thinking and expressing their views on these founding texts. But Acharya Shankara's unique status, both as a philosopher and as a religious reformer, makes his works sparkle among the classical Indian works.

In all these commentaries, he strongly argues for a non-dualistic metaphysics. The very foundation of Advaita metaphysics was laid and elaboration of the main tenets of Advaita school of Indian philosophy was done by Acharya Shankara through his commentaries. Swami Kritarthananda of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission has come up with a compilation of the main views and arguments of Acharya Shankara that one comes across in the commentaries on these founding texts. The present book focuses on the inferential, illustrative, and definitive statements available in these different commentaries of Acharya Shankara. The original Sanskrit sentences along with their English transliterations followed by English translations have been given in this book. Since Acharya Shankara defends the Advaita viewpoint in all his works, the present compilation presents the reader with the main arguments and views of the Advaita philosophy. It requires a very high level of philosophical sophistication and a nuanced knowledge of Sanskrit to decipher the significant statements from the vast repertoire of Acharya Shankara's works containing the Advaita thesis. And Kritarthananda succeeds in this task in an enviable manner. A special feature of this book is the two sets of appendices. In Appendix A all the key Sanskrit terms along with their original references have been mentioned alphabetically. In Appendix B the key English terms have been mentioned alphabetically along with their original references. I salute his commitment and painstaking work to creating this compilation. The present collection will be a constant companion to any researcher on Indian philosophy, not to speak of Advaita philosophy.

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**Spiritual Masters:
Swami Vivekananda**
Prema Nandakumar

Indus Source Books, PO Box 6194,
Malabar Hill, Mumbai 400006. Web-site:
www.indusource.com. 2014. vii +
220 pp. PB. ₹ 225. ISBN 9788188569250

William Shakespeare picturesquely says in *Hamlet*: ‘The apparel oft proclaims the man.’ This dictum applies to any literary work no less than to a person. A handsome stripling’s attractiveness increases by a notch when he is clad in elegant finery. A lofty theme, garbed in verbal costumes of exquisite charm, is bound to be an absorbing read with extra punch. What, then, are we to say of a hagiography of a non-pareil sage penned animatedly by a writer of repute having an inimitable way with words? Well! The cute book under review, sporting on its outer front cover, the mesmeric figure of Swami Vivekananda and treasuring within in its bosom the sacred story of Swamiji narrated in racy style, is precisely a marvellous instance of the wedlock of a sublime theme with sparkling prose.

Swami Vivekananda! What a magic name to conjure with! The very thought of the modern messiah makes the dumb speak and the lame scale the hills! Is there any wonder then that the gifted author’s narrative is unshakably riveting, centring, as it does, on the sublime story of Swamiji?

The book has ten chapters, apart from a section on notes and a select bibliography. The first chapter titled ‘Yoga Bhumi’ focuses on the fact of India ever being a cradle and cornucopia of spirituality and on its stunning powers of resilience and resurgence manifested through the unending succession of spiritual stalwarts, despite periodical setbacks to her spiritual culture.

The second chapter titled ‘Born to Renounce’ records many significant facts like Narendra’s having visions of the Buddha and effulgent light, his mental make-up being moulded by his saintly mother, mild rumblings of longing in his mind to embrace sannyasa, his fearlessness, his good grounding in philosophy, both Western and Indian, his having enviable powers of voracious

reading and flowing eloquence, and his possession of strong physical and intellectual prowess. These facts unmistakably point to his eminent fitness for embracing sannyasa.

The third chapter titled ‘The Master’s Disciple’ charts the path of the evolution of the energetic and the young, if somewhat sceptical, Narendra into a spiritually-mellowed personage by the divine will. The rational and ever-questioning Narendra’s psyche, moulded by the contrasting ideas of Western philosophy and Indian metaphysics and ethics—the latter inputs chiefly fed into him by his religious-minded mother—is, at this stage, an amorphous amalgam of growing belief riddled by the last vestiges of scepticism. The resolve of Sri Ramakrishna, which is only a synonym of the divine will, causes the rational Narendra to be devoured by spirituality whose hallmark is faith in God and guru. For the modern and educated Narendra, it is indeed a violent swing from fragile rationality to full-blooded faith. The author chronicles many episodes in Narendra’s early life and lucidly relates the story of the analytical-minded Narendra’s incredible metamorphosis into an ardent disciple with adamantine faith in the ‘Hound of Heaven’ in the words of Sri Ramakrishna. The rational youth, not altogether free from scepticism, falls a prey to the ‘Divine Hound’ that Sri Ramakrishna is and becomes the Master’s disciple. This chapter retelling the tale of rational Narendra’s tremendous transition from wobbling spirituality to stable and full-fledged spirituality under the catalytic influence of his guru is aptly christened ‘Master’s Disciple’.

The fourth chapter captioned ‘Wanderings in Mother’s Spaces’ narrates the story of the spiritual odyssey of Swami Vivekananda, the monastic name of erstwhile Narendra. Renunciation becomes his mantra and God realisation his goal. Mother Kali is omnipresent. All spaces are hers. But, spiritual exercises like yoga and meditation and geographical places of spiritual sanctity like the Himalayas, Varanasi, and Kanyakumari are quintessentially Mother’s spaces in a special way. Swamiji freely ranges in these lofty spaces of the Mother and adds to his spiritual opulence. He gets definite clues, both from

his Master and others, to the necessity of his Western peregrinations to propagate the eternal message of Vedanta in those regions with a materialistic slant.

The fifth chapter poetically titled ‘The Flame Atop the Hill’ recounts the exciting story of Swamiji igniting the flame of Vedanta on the peak of the mammon’s Empire, namely, Chicago in the US. Swamiji’s epoch-making spiritual feat of hypnotising hedonistic Western audience, by his cascade of eloquence, into positively responding to the clarion call of Vedanta is an unprecedented achievement in the annals of spirituality accomplished against heavy odds. The story of the heroic battle of Swamiji against ‘the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune’ and the whiplashes of grinding poverty to achieve his mission of spreading the gospel of Sanatana Dharma is related with vivacity and verve.

In the sixth chapter titled ‘Vedanta Comes to the West’, the saga of Vedanta ripping, like a whirlwind, through the sprawling tracts of the West is recorded with force and finesse. The torrential eloquence of Swamiji in expounding the tenets of Vedanta which have, for their foundational ideas, the oneness of Existence and universal love, strikes positive chords in the bewildered mind of the West. The wide gamut of topics that Swamiji’s lectures cover is astounding. The pettiness of the frog-in-the-well mindset, the catholicity and vitality of Hinduism, the glory of the Vedas, the congruence of Science and Vedanta, the validity of karma theory, the inspiring note of Vedanta implied in its call ‘*amritasya putrah; heirs of immortality*’, the need for leonine temper as against the sheepish cowardice, the need of motiveless and unselfish love, the concept of *jivanmukti*, the need to aspire for godly perfection, the raison d’être of image worship, Hinduism’s credentials for becoming universal religion, Buddha’s glory, interreligious amity and respect, woman’s education and emancipation, monistic philosophy, theory of reincarnation, equal validity of all religions, the need for bhakti, the power of incarnations—well, the subjects that are grist to the mill of his swaying eloquence are simply astounding! Swamiji’s genius in crafting the

Vedantic technology of selfless service out of the Master’s aphoristic hint ‘jiva is Shiva’, which itself is essentially the popular enunciation of the knowledge of Brahman’s weighty dictum ‘*sarvam khalvidam brahma*; indeed everything in this universe is Brahman’ is pointed out.

The seventh chapter titled ‘A Brave New Movement’ and the eighth chapter titled ‘Spiritual Energy Unparalleled’ describe the farsighted efforts of Swamiji to give permanent structural and propagandist shape to the spiritual campaign of spreading and keeping alive the eternal message of Vedanta. The successful translation of his dreams of raising a temple for Sri Rama-krishna and starting of the journals *Brahmavadin*, *Prabuddha Bharata*, and the *Vedanta Kesari* is recorded with factual fidelity. Swamiji’s second visit to the West for propagation of spiritual ideas is recounted. His planning and erection of a spiritual retreat called ‘Advaita Ashrama’ in the Himalayas for monks for the purpose of doing spiritual austerities for realising the *nirguna* Brahman are also mentioned.

While the ninth chapter titled ‘Merging in the Absolute’ poignantly relates Swamiji’s maha-samadhi and the various episodes connected with it, the tenth chapter is a crisp recapitulation of the signal services rendered by Swamiji for the cause of promoting spirituality.

One conspicuous merit of the book is that it abounds in inspiring and useful quotations from Swamiji, Aurobindo, Sister Nivedita, Swami Nikhilananda, Swami Saradananda, and other great souls.

The book is certainly a tour de force in the genre of hagiography.

N Hariharan
Madurai

***The Goal of Life and
How to Attain It: Spiritual
Sadhana for Everyone***
J P Vaswani

Gita Publishing House, Sadhu Vaswani Mission, 10, Sadhu Vaswani Path, Pune 411001. Email: gph@sadhuvaswani.org. 2011. 228 pp. PB. \$10. ISBN 9789380743172

Man is a strange amphibian oscillating between prolonged hibernation in the tepid waters of terrestrial titillations that go by the name of worldliness and occasional, momentary landings on the mystic shores of spiritualism. Even a hardboiled atheist, who swears by full-blooded materialism and vehemently denies having any trace of spiritual leaning, feels, at times, a sense of lack that is nothing but an index of rumblings of one's spiritual yearning. Spiritual urge is indisputably well-entrenched in the human being. Each and every person has proximate aims and an ultimate goal in one's life. The ultimate goal that is identical and unchangeable for everyone is Self-realisation or release from the transmigratory cycle. Proximate aims in life are manifold and vary from person to person. The proximate aim of a businessperson is profit-making to the maximum extent. That of a householder is to enjoy conjugal life and beget worthy progeny. That of a teenager is to develop a worthy self-image, overcome the emotional conflicts peculiar to one's age, and enjoy the youthful period, untrammelled by any inhibition. Well, the aims of these diverse groups are certainly unexceptionable as long as they do not clash with the ultimate goal of God-realisation. The art of modifying, correcting, and refining one's proximate aims to make them feeders to the ultimate goal of God-realisation has to be consciously cultivated and mastered by each and every aspirant, if one's spiritual voyage, which is the only meaningful one in one's life, is not to suffer shipwreck.

It is precisely the myriad means of cultivating this subtle art of reconciliation of one's proximate aims with the final goal of God-realisation that form the theme of the book under review.

This book has thirteen sections including the foreword. The foreword stresses the supreme value of human birth in which alone one's drifting away from God can be arrested and reversed by conscious efforts and the life-journey can be decisively oriented towards the pole star of God-realisation, only to eventually revel in the bliss that the destination of divine experience copiously affords.

The second section titled 'What is Sadhana?'

commends a simple spiritual formula with its triple strands of silence, sangha, and service which, in turn, translate into Self-inquiry in the depths of silence, self-surrender, a lofty attribute forged and fabricated in the mint of holy company and selfless service, the logical corollary of the former two traits.

The third section titled 'You Are Responsible for Your Own Salvation' emphasises the necessity of self-effort in the scheme of spiritual progress. The punchy statement that salvation cannot be outsourced is made to stress the need for self-effort.

The fourth section titled 'Goal of Life' commends to us the life of spirit as our goal as against the life of flesh. The life of spirit is a perpetual quest of Truth and a ceaseless battle against desires while the life of flesh is vulgar wallowing in the mire of paltry pleasures and hastening the drifting away from God.

The fifth section titled 'Sadhana is For Everyone' maintains categorically that sadhana is for all sections and strata of society and not meant exclusively for the renunciates withdrawn from life. Sadhana is nothing but self-discipline, which is admittedly the sine qua non for everyone's progress in all the walks of life.

The sixth section titled 'Sadhana for Children' insists on the need to inculcate in children the virtues of self-discipline, moral earnestness, religious-mindedness, surrender to the guru and God, willingness to share, cooperation, dedication to constructive and selfless activities, and the love of singing the names of God.

The seventh to eleventh sections titled 'Sadhana for Teenagers', 'Sadhana for Businessmen and Professionals', 'Sadhana for the Grihastha or Householder', 'Sadhana for Beginners', and 'Sadhana for the Spiritual Aspirant' identify the Achilles heel of the respective groups and prescribe sadhanas tailored to their needs.

The teenagers' mental streak of rebelliousness, dissonance of outlook from that of the elders, their identity-crisis, and the general turmoil in their minds are sought to be rectified by the sadhanas of discipline consistent with their legitimate sense of autonomy, patient inculcation of healthy values, their exposure to

the triple disciplines of *shravana*, *manana*, and *nididhyasana*, instilling of the virtues of duty-consciousness, giving of one's best, service-mindedness, self-control, altruistic living, and awareness of the Divine.

The weakness of the professionals and businesspeople is their proneness to greed and resort to malpractices in earning wealth. Prayer, probity, equanimity, strong faith, remaining ever wired to God and indifference to qualities like gain and loss are advocated as antidotes to their foibles.

The capital flaw that subverts the healthy life of householders is their warped view of marriage as more a concession to human weakness than a means of spiritual growth. The misunderstanding, lack of the attitude of give-and-take, the mistrust and pugnacious spirit of the spouses are sought to be remedied by spiritual exercises such as congregational singing of the names of God, joint prayer, joint reading of spiritual literature, and conscious attempts to counteract evil tendencies by divine thoughts.

The spiritual regimen for the neophytes in the discipline of spiritual sadhana is prescribed as awakening to the grandeur of spirit from the dope of materialism, practice of silence, avoidance of fault-finding, unitive vision, and compassion.

The spiritual aspirant's imperatives of sadhana are intense love of God, repugnance to materialism, swift rectification of wrongs unwittingly committed, forgiveness, consecration of all acts to God; connect with God at multiple levels and service-mindedness.

While the lengthy twelfth section elaborates on the nine practical techniques of sadhana such as silence, holy company, reverence, concentration, meditation, prayer, physical discipline, mental discipline, and spiritual discipline; the thirteenth section lists the various obstacles in the path of sadhana and suggests ways of overcoming them.

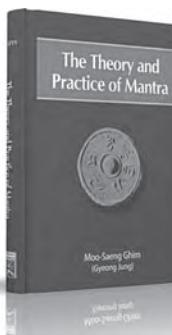
It is Vaswani's genius that he can effortlessly disseminate spiritual wisdom through interesting and engaging accounts, anecdotes, and humorous tales. The reader gets an easy access to life-changing philosophy without having to exert any extra

effort. A large corpus of such literature penned by the facile and versatile author that Vaswani is, stands testimony to the fact that abstruse philosophy can indeed be made understandable even by a child much like Swami Vivekananda envisioned.

The spiritual aspirant who pilots the ship of one's life towards the goal of God-realisation needs one's own mariner's compass to follow the right track on the swirling waves of samsara. This book is precisely that compass of immense practical value for all spiritual seekers.

N Hariharan

Madurai



The Theory and Practice of Mantra

Moo-Saeng Ghim

(*Gyeong Jung*)

Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, PO Box 5715, 54 Rani Jhansi Road, New Delhi 110055. Website: www.mrmlbooks.com. 2014. xviii + 450 pp. HB. ₹ 1,295. ISBN 9788121510981

Mantra has attracted several scholars including Sir John Woodroffe, Frits Staal, J Gonda, André Padoux, and Sanjukta Gupta, to name a few. And its literature spans from rich anthologies to independent studies. A bibliography which appeared in a valuable volume, *Understanding Mantra*, edited by Harvey P Alper, runs into nearly seventy pages. (See *Understanding Mantras*, ed. Harvey P Alper (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2012)).

The book under review is a full length study by Mao-Saeng Ghim, a priest of the Jingak Buddhist Order in South Korea. He has a doctoral thesis on mantra, which took the form of this book. It has a vast range of areas where the mantric presence is deep rooted. The book, as such, includes mantra and its history and practice in India, Nepal, China, and Tibet.

Like any researcher, Ghim assures us that though his focus is on Esoteric Buddhism, he includes 'other traditions of the subject as well'. And the book begins, after a mandatory 'Introduction', with the 'Definition of Mantra'. Followed by the Buddhist variation of meaning,

inclusive of a few historical views, and concludes with the 'Doctrinal Position of Mantra in Esoteric Buddhism'. It is obviously a Buddhism-oriented study.

Ghim rightly mentions in the very introduction that 'mantra' raises several questions for 'further research' like 'linguistic, physiological, philological, philosophical, psychological' (1). But he makes another statement: 'The study of mantra must be accompanied with broadly two spheres, one that of the theoretical study based on texts and of practical traditions in which the mantric practice was born, and the other that of the scientific study based on the relative modern science with which the practice of mantra can be justified. However, the cooperative research is expected to generate more effective results' (*ibid.*).

I was a bit puzzled: 'justification' through science of study should be based on the relatively modern science with which the practice of mantra can be justified. However, cooperative research is expected to generate more effective results. One, at least I got a little puzzled about the 'scientific' cooperative research. If I am not mistaken, Buddha and his teachings are rooted in the conviction that, as Christopher I Beckwith in his interesting book *Greek Buddha* put it: 'The Buddha's great insight, as stated in *Trilakṣaṇa*, is that absolute, perfect categories and concepts conceived by humans are among the obstacles to achieving passionlessness and nirvana; it is necessary to get rid of them in order to progress' (Christopher I Beckwith, *Greek Buddha: Pyrrho's Encounter with Early Buddhism in Central Asia* (New Jersey: Princeton University), 36).

This is only to express my scepticism about making science and its apparatus indispensable to all areas. I could hardly find any comprehensive account and role of science vis-à-vis Buddhism or mantra. To resume, Ghim's views on mantra and Tantra are focused on Kashmir Shaivism. In this area, Ghim's views seem to be akin to what Harvey C Alper and other scholars regard as 'dichotomy' between 'alinguisticality' and 'meaningfulness' imbedded in the 'primal sound'. We have also the Vedic priests' identification of parts of the

body with the parts of a variety of gods, even as mantras are recited.

It is a fascinating revelation which Ghim offers us about 'the *parittas* of southern Buddhism ... found even in Chinese Piṭaka' (144). 'The original is changed into another style' though the fact remains that linguistics does not yield understanding through words. Mantras in any way transcend name and form.

This accounts for the paradox of this area: mantra is central but its manifest forms appear in a variety of linguistic structures. A final word I would add is: this study needs, structurally, more care, though Ghim's book remains an important sourcebook.

*Prof. M Sivaramkrishna
Former Chair, Department of English
Osmania University, Hyderabad*

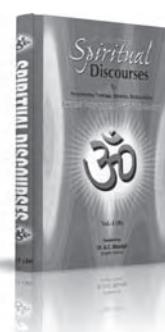
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(Vol 1-A)**

Swami Dayanand Giri
Trans. Dr A C Moudgil

Devotees of Swami Dayanand Giri Ji Maharaj, G C Garg, 99, Preet Nagar, Ambala City 134 003. 2014. 394 pp. For Free Distribution. HB.



**A Collection of
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(Vol 1-B)**

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Devotees of Swami Dayanand Giri Ji Maharaj, G C Garg, 99, Preet Nagar, Ambala City 134 003. 2014. 412 pp. For Free Distribution. HB.

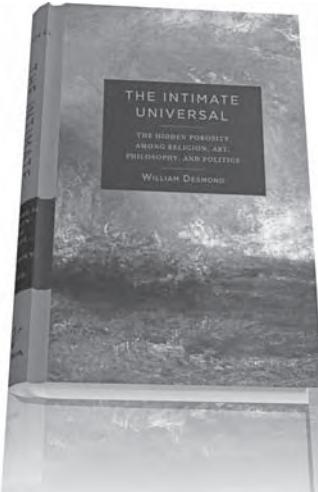
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**The Intimate Universal:
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William Desmond

Columbia University Press, 61 West 62 Street, New York, NY 10023. USA. 2016. xii + 506 pp. \$65.00. HB. ISBN 9780231178761.



THE QUESTION of the universal so constantly recurs throughout the philosophical tradition that one might be tempted to think of it as being a perplexity, more or less universal. The *quest* of the universal is also deeply *intimate* to that long tradition, though the intimacy is not often, if at all, made a theme for reflection. Why are the intimate quest and the universal question not held together? Can we wed the intimacy of the quest with the universality of the question? Can we speak of it at all? How can we speak of the intimate universal? Does this universal withdraw from our grasp with a transcendence of which we are not the measure? Does it elude us in an intimacy verging on the inarticulate? Or is the intimate the space wherein the universal comes to articulation? Do we need a plurality of lines of approach to do justice to its significance? The different explorations of this work will suggest how we might respond to such questions, and do so diversely. Can we, how can we, do justice to the intimate universal? This will be our concern.

One is struck by contradictory attitudes toward the universal in the history of thought. There is no doubt that a preferential option for the universal throughout the long history

of philosophy is echoed in religious and theological reflection. This preferential option mutates into new forms with modern developments of scientific theory, now being implemented on larger scales by means of practical and technological applications. It also seeps into a multitude of political arrangements or formations, even granting that the universal is sometimes hindered by, or counterfeited by, these formations. Yet one would be deaf to contrary currents if one did not hear loud shouts that counter the universal in recent post-Enlightenment, indeed anti-Enlightenment thinking. I want to dwell on some of these contrary attitudes here by way of introducing the intimate universal.

First, to the longer-standing practice of the honoring of the universal, how to speak of it? One notes how many thinkers breathe far more freely with the universal than the intimate. The universal, they hold, puts us out in the open, so to say. We are not locked up in ourselves, or to be locked up. We enter the space of what is more than ourselves. The universal offers us a public space for thought, so the philosophers will insist; or a communal forum moderating antagonism for the practice of a religion, as a variety of theologians will concur; or a neutral or unbiased

intermedium for scientific theory, as those practicing science without particular frontiers will claim. The universal is corrective to wayward selving, be it religious, philosophical, or scientific. It disciplines that waywardness in the direction of the socially or institutionally approved line. It is therapeutic in releasing us from obsession with our small selves. It is elevating in lifting us to the higher level of the real. It is redemptive of our solitudes, since in and through it we are no longer alone and find our place within the larger whole.

To illustrate: one thinks of the overriding tendency in recent philosophy to reject subjectivisms or ‘privacies’ in favor of linguistically meditated responses, be these on the Continental or analytical side of philosophy. One thinks of religious movements in which it is the community of believers, not to say millennial traditions with their sanctioned public rituals and liturgies that receive the accolades. One thinks also of the internationalism that is immanent in the scientific quest of the universal. This preferential option for the universal is especially evident in the suspicion that any predilection for the intimate will end in something smacking of mere ‘mysticism’. At the mention of mysticism the response will be like someone with a sweet tooth being forced to suck lemons—the smile on the face vanishes as the mouth puckers in sour distress. This is evident among the philosophers, and while scientific theorists might not give the matter much thought, one would undoubtedly find the same face of sour distress at claims not completely containable within the public universal. One notes too how institutionally based practices of religion often look with suspicion on mystical claims: these claims skirt the edges of orthodoxy in their often highly paradoxical modes of expression, if not sometimes idiosyncratic practices of devotion.

What then of the second contrary current? Recently, it is notable that there is a more antagonistic attitude to the universal that we find in critics of the Enlightenment project. This is a complex business, but one important aspect of the matter is the imputation of pretense to the rational universal. This pretense communicates the pretension to speak on behalf of all rational beings, indifferently, neutrally, homogeneously, fairly; but the pretension is pretense in that the speaking hides the elevation of the particular way of thinking, or indeed way of life, in the paradigm of universality, and in the masking of its incorrigible particularity. What is to be decried is the failure to be universal of the pretense to the universal. And in this instance, the lesson to be drawn is that the pretense to the universal can only be that, pretense: the recessed particularity is always more ultimately constitutive of our situation as such. Now our task is not to rally to the defense of the universal but to advance the recovery of the recessed, even subjugated particularity. Reversing decamping from the particular to the universal, we pitch our tents on the plain of particularity and fly there the colors of singularity, never to be surpassed by mere generality.

There are signs in relation to this second current that the universal is now receiving more respectful treatment, not least in reaction to the overreaction of the anti-Enlightenment scourges of the universal. Is this to the good in relation to the intimate universal? I would say that my suggestion of the intimate universal does not find itself fully at home in either of the two contrary currents. The meaning of this is to be seen in the working out of the suggestion. Yet one can see that if there is an intimate universal it must address something of what appears justified in both of these contrary currents. This too must be addressed in the sequel.

REPORTS

Celebration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Sister Nivedita

Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata, conducted a youth convention on 21 August 2016 in which 350 people participated. Prizes were distributed to the winners of the cultural competitions the centre had conducted earlier.

Bhopal centre held two talks on Sister Nivedita on 25 and 26 October which were attended altogether by about 1,200 people, mostly students.

A Tamil book on Sister Nivedita, jointly published by **Chennai Vidyapith** and **Chennai Math**, was released in a special programme held at Chennai Vidyapith on 25 October.

Gadadhar Ashrama conducted a devotees' convention on 25 September in which 125 devotees took part.

Jamshedpur centre conducted cultural programmes and competitions in three of its schools on 28 October.

On 28 October, **Ponnampet** centre held a programme comprising bhajans, speeches and screening of a film on Sister Nivedita. Nearly 200 people attended the programme.

Rajkot centre conducted values education programmes at 7 schools in Rajkot which were attended by about 2,000 students.

Visakhapatnam centre conducted a written quiz competition on Sister Nivedita in which nearly 87,000 students from 575 schools in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana participated. The final round of the competition was held on 28 October. About 2,000 prizes were given away to the winners.

Swamiji's Ancestral House held a cultural programme on 1 October which was attended by about 500 people. On the centre's initiative,

two programmes were held at Kolkata and Chin-sura on 23 and 28 September. In all, 650 people attended the programmes.

Florida (USA) centre held lectures, cultural programmes, and screening of a film on Sister Nivedita on 22 and 23 October.

News of Branch Centres

Durga Puja, in image, was celebrated at the following 25 centres: **Antpur, Asansol, Barasat, Contai, Cooch Behar, Dhaleswar**—under Agartala, Ghatshila, Guwahati, Jalpaiguri, Jamshedpur, Jayrambati, Kailashahar, Kamarpukur, Karimganj, Lucknow, Malda, Medinipur, Mumbai, Patna, Port Blair, Rahara, Shella—under Cherrapunjee, Shillong, Silchar, and Varanasi **Advaita Ashrama**. Sri Nitish Kumar, chief minister of Bihar, attended Durga Puja celebration at **Patna** centre on 9 October, Mahashtami day.

The High School attached to **Vijayawada** centre celebrated its golden jubilee on 2 October. Swami Gautamanandaji, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission and Adhyaksha, Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, presided over the programme in which Sri N Chinarajappa, deputy chief minister of Andhra Pradesh, and others took part.

At **Coimbatore Mission** centre, the year-long platinum jubilee celebration of TAT Kalanilayam Middle School and diamond jubilee celebrations of Maruthi College of Physical Education, Polytechnic College, and Institute of Agriculture and Rural Development were inaugurated on 3 October. Besides, the buildings for Fitness and Sports Sciences Resource Centre and TAT Kalanilayam Middle School were inaugurated on 3 and 4 October.

Sri Ajay Tamta, Minister of State for Textiles, Government of India, visited **Almora** Ashrama on 5 October.

A student of **Coimbatore Mission** centre won the gold medal in Junior Boys category of the State Archery Championship held by Tamil Nadu State Archery Association on 9 and 10 October.

Durga Puja in image, was performed in **Durban** centre, and its sub-centres at **Chatsworth** and **Pietermaritzburg**, **Mauritius** Ashrama, and the following 12 centres in **Bangladesh**: **Baliati**, **Barisal**, **Chittagong**, **Comilla**, **Dhaka**, **Dinajpur**, **Faridpur**, **Habiganj**, **Jessore**, **Narayanganj**, **Rangpur**, **Sylhet**, and Narail sub-centre of **Jessore** Ashrama. At Dhaka centre, Prime Minister of Bangladesh Ms Sheikh Hasina, Minister of Home Affairs Mr Asaduzzaman Khan, Minister of Health and Family Welfare Mohammed Nasim, Former President Mr H M Ershad, Mayor of Dhaka (South) Mr Sayeed Khokon, Inspector General of Police Mr A K M Shahidul Hoque, High Commissioner of India Mr Harsh Vardhan Shringla, and other dignitaries attended the Durga Puja celebration. On the Ashtami day, nearly 15,000 people witnessed the Kumari Puja and were served cooked Prasad.

The renovated dining-hall at **Dhaka** centre was inaugurated on 2 October.

Relief

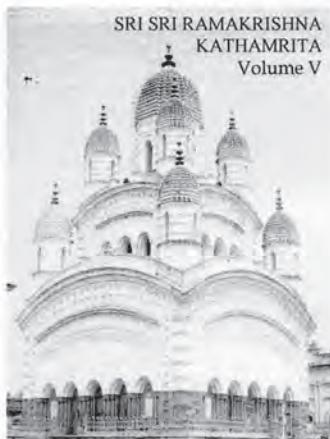
Flood Relief: **Bihar**: **Katihar** centre distributed 150 saris, 150 dhotis, 150 solar lamps, and 1,000 blankets among 1,000 affected families of 15 villages in Katihar district from 26 September to 4 November. **Patna** centre distributed 52 kg gram flour among 52 affected families at Ravidas Tola in Patna district on 21 October.

Fire Relief: **Narottam Nagar** centre distributed on 3 November, 35 blankets and 35 sweatshirts among 35 families affected by an accidental fire at a slum in Tinkonia, Tinsukia district, Assam.

Winter Relief: 2,569 blankets were distributed to poor people through the following centres: **Ghatshila**: 250, from 2 October to 7 November; **Indore**: 400, on 27 November; **Khetri**: 53, on 27 November; **Limbdi**: 426, on 22 November; **Malda**: 805, October and November; **Manasad-wip**: 200, from 26 to 29 November; **Rajamahendravaram**: 135, on 13 November; **Bangladesh**: **Dhaka**: 300, on 19 November.

Distress Relief: The following centres distributed various items, as shown against their names, to needy people: **India**: (a) **Baranagar Mission**: 457 T-shirts from 24 September to 30 October. (b) **Gurap**: 326 saris, 125 dhotis, 374 shirts, 299 T-shirts, 334 tops, 10 frocks, and 690 pants from 25 September to 15 October. (c) **Halasuru**: 5,238 shirts, 1,393 T-shirts, and 3,889 pants from 27 October to 16 November. (d) **Itanagar**: 500 kg rice, 125 kg dal, 25 kg edible oil, 12 kg molasses, 25 kg salt, 250 matchboxes, 50 packets of candles, 50 bars of soap, 25 kg detergent powder, 50 mats, and 25 sets of utensils (each set containing a plate, a cup, and a tumbler) on 28 September. (e) **Koyilandy**: 930 shirts and 620 pants on 6 and 20 November. (f) **Malda**: 802 saris and 150 sets of children garments in October and November. (g) **Mysuru**: 170 shirts, 170 pants, and 170 saris on 26 November. (h) **Rajkot**: 6,847 gents garments and 9,248 ladies garments in November. (i) **Saradapitha, Belur**: 36 notebooks, 10 boxes of crayons, 10 drawing books, and 40 pencils on 2 October. (j) **Vrindaban**: 420 kg rice, 420 kg flour, 105 kg dal, 105 kg edible oil, 21 kg turmeric powder, 210 kg salt, 105 kg sugar, 21 kg tea leaves, 42 kg milk powder, 210 bars of washing soap, and 42 kg washing powder on 9 November. **Bangladesh**: (a) **Dhaka**: 300 saris, 1,500 kg rice, 300 kg dal, 150 litres of edible oil, and 150 kg sugar on 19 November. (b) **Habiganj**: 150 dhotis, 150 lungis, 150 kg flour, 150 plates, and 150 tumblers on 19 November. (c) **Mymensingh**: 200 saris and 108 dhotis in October.





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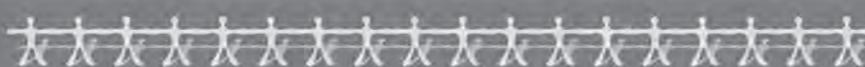
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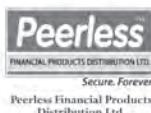
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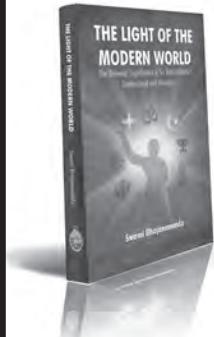
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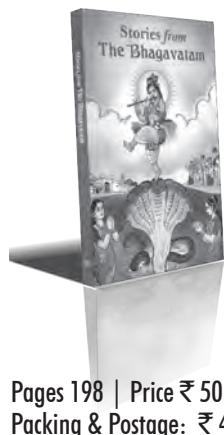
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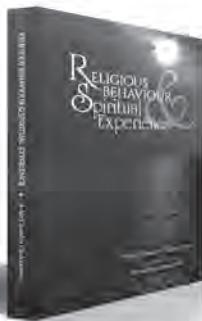


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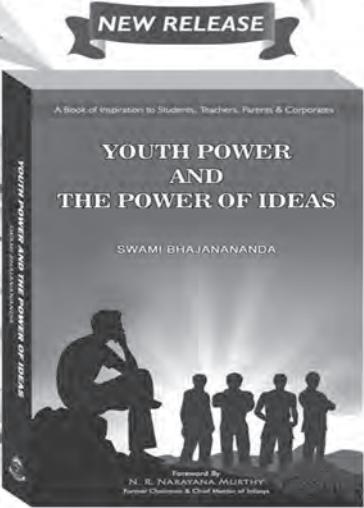
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Swami Vivekananda



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death.

Fear nothing, stop at nothing.
You will be like lions. We must
rouse India and the whole
world.

Never say, 'No', never say, 'I
cannot', for you are infinite.

—Swami Vivekananda





An Appeal

The incessant rain in Uttarakhand has brought about destruction on a large scale this year.

However, with the grace of Sri Sri Thakur and Sri Maa the ashrama has been spared from any damage.

Meanwhile in this ancient land of pilgrimage this ashrama carved out in Shi Shri Thakur's name has found a place in the hearts of many devotees. Lovers of pilgrimages, the Himalayan people, have accepted this new place of worship (established in 2014) dedicated to Thakur Maa Swamiji with love, respect and devotion.

Therefore, taking the future into consideration the need is to earmark the sliding zones and build strong retaining walls.

For this purpose, the estimated cost will be approximately 30 lakh rupees. We appeal to all devotees to please donate generously towards this venture. May Thakur Maa Swamiji shower their choicest blessings on each one of you.

This is my heartfelt prayer.

Yours in the lord

Swami Sarvatmananda
Secretary

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In religion, as in all other matters,
discard everything that weakens
you, have nothing to do with it.

—Swami Vivekananda



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